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On the Outside Looking In: A Qualitative Study of Southern Appalachian  
First-Generation Students' Perceptions of Higher Education

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A dissertation  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Leadership and Policy Analysis  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education

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by  
Michael Briggs  
December 2010

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Dr. Jasmine Renner  
Dr. Eric Glover  
Dr. Joseph Sobol

Keywords: Southern Appalachia, First-generation, College, Expectations, Perceptions

## ABSTRACT

### On the Outside Looking In: A Qualitative Study of Southern Appalachian First-generation Students' Perceptions of Higher Education

by

Michael Briggs

This study was designed to investigate Southern Appalachian, first-generation students' expectations of higher education. Research indicates that many first-generation students drop out of college after only 1 semester; however, little research exists concerning the expectations and experiences of first-generation college students from Southern Appalachia.

The study employs a qualitative methodology based in the tradition of grounded theory to highlight students' experiences while encouraging the emergence of data-driven theory based on what the researcher heard. Thus, the entire study is couched in the interpretivist philosophy of research.

Eleven full-time university students were interviewed for the study. They were asked to identify their perceptions of college and the effect of parents, friends, and culture on their decision to attend college. Students talked about their life goals and how a university education has helped them move toward those goals. Ultimately, students commented on the transformational aspects of higher education in their lives and how they have begun a life journey that will transform their lives for the better.

The primary significance of this study lies in the fact that it addresses first-generation students

from Southern Appalachia, a group of students that has been ignored by most research dealing with the issue of first-generation students generally. This study highlights issues related to first-generation students' college experiences and how institutions of higher education might better serve those students and keep them engaged in the educational process through to graduation.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to the memory of my parents—Grady and Rozelle Briggs—whose love and support throughout my life helped guide me to this point. I would also like to dedicate this project to the students whose stories became the heart and soul of my research. Finally, I would like to dedicate what was the initial idea for this project to a certain student in Waycross, Georgia who in 1986 did not believe in dinosaurs.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Context of the Study

Going away to college is one of the important rites of passage that millions of young people experience each year. Proud parents help their children carry luggage, microwave ovens, and boxes of books into the dormitory rooms that will serve as home away from home for the new students. Formal research and anecdotal evidence indicate that the experience is exciting and intimidating at the same time for both new students and their parents (Cutrona, 1982; Hammen, 1980; Lokitz & Sprandel, 1976). Many students can rely upon their parents, older relatives, and friends for emotional support as they begin their foray into higher education. Parents might recall the days when they were college students with the hope their children will have the incredible learning experiences they did (if not the more mischievous life experiences that come with the freedom of college). There is a feeling of continuity and the great cycle of life repeating itself as a new class enters into the halls of academe each fall. When these students share their feelings about college, their stories are very often filled with idealism and optimism for the future. Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, and Hunsberger (2000) found that students who entered college with high expectations about college—based on preconceptions, stories from family members, and other sources—tended to fair better during their first year of study than students who were fearful of or had no feelings about college when they began study.

It is these other students that form the basis for this study. Their story is not that of continuity as its tellers are new to the experience of college in a way that more traditionally prepared students do not understand. This other story is that of the first-generation college student who comes to campus in the fall with little or no preparation for what college holds in

store. This story contains many of the experiences that other students know, but there is an added sense of isolation, the distinct feeling that college is an alien environment that makes the giddiness of high school graduation seem like a distant memory of a world receding at a scary pace. The burden of being a first-generation college student is often compounded by the regional culture from which the student hails. Southern Appalachia, with its history of staunch individualism and pride, does not encourage overt emotional reactions to life's difficulties, college included. Some first-generation college students find that they have little in the way of support from family and friends as they begin the matriculation process.

The literature on first-generation students supports the theory that higher education can be a lonely, frustrating experience for students who are not prepared for the transformational aspects of college. Horn (1998) examined the educational experiences of college students who leave school before their second year of study and found that nearly one quarter of all first-generation students leave school during or shortly after their first year of study. Likewise, Tinto (2000) indicated that colleges with programs that more fully engage first-generation students in the culture of higher education report a much smaller percentage of students leaving school before their second year of study. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) argued that a close relationship with “authoritative parents” was one indicator of success for first year students (p. 11); however, that relationship is problematic if parents do not have first-hand knowledge of the culture of higher education.

From a scholarly perspective, there are data available to quantify first-generation college students for administrative purposes. Reports point out that first-generation students are less likely to live on campus or feel satisfied with the campus environment, seek advice or help from professors, or perceive their professors as being concerned about their development as college

students (Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Furthermore, first-generation students are less likely to participate in extra curricular activities or cultural events on campus or develop friendships with other students (Billson & Terry, 1982; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1996). It comes as no surprise that Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) highlight a 15% gap between the 3-year persistence rates of first- and second-generation students (73% and 88%, respectively). While several of these studies are dated and do not take into consideration the effect of current economic patterns or shifts in career opportunities, many administrators assume that such statistics “tell the tale,” so to speak. Nevertheless, there is a need for naturalistic, qualitative research into the phenomenon so that first-generation college students can tell their stories and add their voices to the very human activity of education. To that end, this study can serve as a first step toward a better understanding of the expectations first-generation college students in southern Appalachia have of higher education and the effect it has on their lives.

Gammell (2006) suggested that Appalachian students function within a bicultural atmosphere much like that of Hispanic and other minority-status students and, like those students, must seek adequate transition modes to function effectively within higher education. Darling (1999) assessed research on Appalachian culture and the transition to higher education and found scant information to shed light on the phenomenon. In order for college faculty and administrators to work with first-generation students in the most effective way possible, they should take into account the stories that such students share about their expectations of and experiences with higher education and how those expectations and experiences were molded by their Southern Appalachian heritage and culture.

In discussing the various passages that a new student faces in college, Tinto (1993) suggested that part of a student's decision to stay in school rides on his or her experiences with, among other things, the social milieu of higher education. Similarly, Lichtenstein (2005) found that specially designed learning communities for first year students helped first-generation students successfully transition into the cultural and intellectual aspects of higher education that oftentimes elude them. London (1996) referred to successful first-generation students as "educational pioneers" (p. 11) because they are the first in their families to attempt higher education, which should encourage administrators and professors to view first-generation students as potential ambassadors for higher education in their home communities. Likewise, scholars in the field of leadership studies might consider these "educational pioneers" prime candidates for specialized training in leadership theory and practice.

As part of his lengthy research on the social milieu of higher education, Tinto (1987, 1988, 1993) argued that the academic and social environments of a college determine whether a student will stay enrolled after one semester. Further, he postulated that students are more likely to withdraw from higher education if the perceived values of the institution are significantly different from those of the students and their communities of origin. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) recognized a need for first-generation students to "negotiate a transition" that allows them to function properly within the higher education community and, at the same time, honor their home community. With regard to the stages of passage from community of origin to the community of higher education, Tinto (1993) suggested that students must successfully navigate three important "linkages" in order to achieve membership in college: separation, transition, and incorporation. Tinto's theory of stages of passage can be traced to Van Gennep (1909/1960) who suggested that individuals move horizontally from membership in one group to another group as

part of important life passages (adulthood, marriage, birth, and death). The passages provide social stability and allow younger members to take on the responsibilities of new members in an orderly fashion that ensures continuity of social constructs and mores. Tinto (1993) likewise suggested that first-year college students go through a similar series of passages that separates them from their community of origin and prepares them to accept the social and academic constructs inherent to the college environment. Astin (1984) commented on the idea of separation and transition by focusing on activities that help first-generation students feel engaged with the college community, including living on campus, working part-time on campus, participating in fraternities and sororities, and getting involved in various campus-based social events. Carter and Robinson (2002) explored the effects of educational preparation, financial assistance, cultural backgrounds, and transition to higher education among rural, first-generation Appalachian college students and found that such students perform better when they are involved in programs that encourage social and cultural involvement in the campus community. Regarding the effect of cultural background, Ishitani (2005) used longitudinal studies from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) to study first-generation students from 8<sup>th</sup> grade through high school and found that, among other things, vocal support and encouragement from parents and teachers are crucial to a first-generation student's decision to apply to college and, once there, matriculate successfully.

Finally, within the realm of social, philosophical, and psychological archetypes, Joseph Campbell (1949), the eminent American mythologist, established the "monomyth" as a means of understanding the common threads that run through legendary and mythological accounts of heroes from various world cultures. The narrative model can be used to construct the journey of transformation and enlightenment that is part of the higher education experience for all students,

including first-generation students. In defining the model, Campbell wrote: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (Campbell, 1949). The monomyth includes five stages or levels of self-discovery: a call to adventure, a road of trials, achieving the goal or “boon,” a return to the ordinary world, and application of the boon. Campbell was influenced by Van Gennep’s theories regarding rites of passage (1909/1960). In turn, Campbell’s work informs commentary on the transitions indicated by studies geared toward students’ academic experiences (Bridges, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993) and can be used as a model for understanding the processes by which Southern Appalachian, first-generation students pursue and experience higher education.

#### Background of the Problem

A review of the literature associated with first-generation students reveals little in the way of qualitative research related to the experiences of first-generation students from Southern Appalachia. Indeed, most studies (Clauss-Ehlers, 2007; Inkelas et al., 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; & Terenzini et al., 1996) are quantitative in nature, but do numbers tell the whole story? What about these students’ perceptions of higher education? How are their perceptions of higher education formed? Recent quantitative statistics indicate that first-generation students will increasingly make up a sizeable percentage of incoming students in higher education over the next 20 years (Mitchell, 1997; Terenzini et al., 1996). Southern Appalachia is not immune to these changes, and, as a result, many first-generation students from the area will realize the need to seek education beyond high school. Can qualitative research shed light on the experiences and perceptions of first-generation



college students from Southern Appalachia?

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate first-generation, Southern Appalachian students' perceptions of higher education from a qualitative perspective. Specifically, the study focuses on students' experiences related to classroom and administration interactions, campus culture, and the effect of home and family on college work. Research indicates that a large percentage of first-generation students drop out of school after their first semester because of frustrations associated with the experiences listed above. This study gives first-generation students from Southern Appalachia an opportunity to share the experiences (and the challenges) that mold their attitudes about college and the perceptions of higher education they hold that extend from their home culture. The study will address first-generation, Southern Appalachian students' perceptions of the following issues:

- Importance of home culture, including family and friends, in the decision to pursue higher education
- Culture of higher education:
  - a. classroom interaction with professors and classmates,
  - b. social opportunities on campus
  - c. transformative aspects of college culture

### Significance of the Study

The primary significance of this study lies in the fact that it addresses first-generation students from Southern Appalachia, a group of students that has been ignored by most research dealing with the issue of first-generation students generally. The study applies the bicultural model espoused by Gammell (2006) but goes a step further in considering Southern Appalachian

students who are also first-generation students. The study seeks to highlight issues related to Southern Appalachian, first-generation students' college experiences that differentiate them from students whose parents and other relatives have gone to college and earned degrees. As a result of this study, ETSU and other institutions of higher education might better serve first-generation students and keep them engaged in the educational process through to graduation. While this study focuses on a particular group of first-generation students, the emergent theory may inform future studies of first-generation students regardless of their communities of origin or institutions of study.

The findings will inform administrators, especially those involved in recruitment and retention, of the perceptions that first-generation, Southern Appalachian students have about college. Such knowledge would assist recruiters, advisers, and other personnel to develop special programs that would encourage such students to remain in school and continue working toward a degree. The findings will also inform professors' understanding of the particular culture that Southern Appalachian, first-generation students bring to their studies, including personal and family beliefs about the purpose and importance of higher education.

### Research Questions

The following four research questions define this study.

1. What were first-generation college students' perceptions of higher education culture when they enrolled in college?
2. Did family, friends, native culture, or a combination of the three influence first-generation students' expectations of higher education and their decision to pursue a college degree?
3. How do these students process the social and intellectual demands of higher

education?

4. Did first-generation students experience aspects of higher education that they would qualify as transformational?

### Scope of the Study

In order to understand how first-generation, Southern Appalachian students perceive and process their experiences in higher education, I chose a qualitative methodology to encourage students to tell their stories and share their experiences with college. The interpretive research model is based on the metaphysical idea that reality does not exist as a single, external truth that can be quantified easily; rather, there are individual realities, with each existing as a construct of a person's social and psychological contexts. As such, value is personal to the individual, even though one's personal value can influence other individuals' values. Moreover, the interpretive model demands that words be given meaning, which is at the heart of qualitative research. Because I wished to interpret the feelings, emotions, and thought processes of first-generation college students as expressed through their words—separate from my personal, preconceived notions about the intent of study—I chose a grounded theory method that would allow for the emergence of data-driven theory that would “offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The grounded theory study is based on interviews with currently enrolled, first-generation students at East Tennessee State University who identify as Southern Appalachian. In order to hear as much information as possible for the scope of this study, 11 students were interviewed. Students were selected from freshman classes in the school's English department.

### East Tennessee State University

East Tennessee State University is located in Northeast Tennessee and provides a

comprehensive array of instructional programs for students from throughout the Southern Appalachian region immediately surrounding the school as well as students who are from other parts of the United States and international students. According to the most current ETSU Fact Book (2007), enrollment at the school is over 13,500 students, including undergraduate, graduate, medical students, and medical residents. While most students are from Tennessee, the school does serve students from over 40 states and 60 foreign countries.

### Definition of Terms

*First-Generation Student*—For the purpose of this study, the term “first-generation” refers to students whose parents have not pursued higher education.

*Southern Appalachia*—This study includes participants from East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, and Western North Carolina, all of which can be generally defined as Southern Appalachia.

*Administration*—For the purpose of this study, the term “administration” refers to nonacademic offices that maintain and control the various functions on campus. For students, “administration” oftentimes refers to either the registrar’s office or the financial aid office.

*Classroom*—A classroom is any room on campus in which classes are held. Classroom culture includes the interactions between professors and students, including lectures and discussions, and the use of classroom technology (Smart technology, films, textbooks, online resources, etc.) to facilitate learning.

### Statement of Researcher Perspective

As a researcher interested in the phenomenon of first-generation college students, I bring a particular bias to this assessment, as I am also a first-generation college student who grew up in southern Appalachia. I chose a liberal arts degree rather than a preprofessional degree, and,

ultimately, I chose a career in academia, yet I can still recall the uneasy feeling of being left out on some of the basic knowledge of college culture that my friends who were not first-generation students already knew. Granted, most of us were intimidated by the university system, and many of us experienced hard lessons about dealing with university administrators and professors who had no interest in our personal issues. Nevertheless, as a first-generation student, I felt especially off balance.

Shortly after I earned an MA in English, I accepted a teaching position at a community college that served a rather large community in a Southern state that includes part of what is ordinarily designated as Southern Appalachia. Although I did not poll the students, I would imagine that a majority of the students at the school would have self-identified as first-generation. Moreover, many of the students had trouble merging the ethical and moral standards of their community of origin with the academic standards of the school. There were issues of racism and class underlying interactions between students and faculty. There were also issues related to religious beliefs that came into play with regard to some students' ability to function effectively in the environment of higher education.

One student in particular stands out in my memory and is the basis for my desire to learn more about the perceptions of first-generation students as they enter college. I had assigned an essay by Stephen Jay Gould (1987) about the extinction of dinosaurs. As was my usual habit, I also had students read the essay aloud in class, paragraph by paragraph. Each student read a paragraph and, slowly, we made our way through the relatively long, involved essay. One student, however, refused to read. The class was large and there were many paragraphs to cover, so I skipped him and moved on. After class, the student approached me to explain why he would not read from Gould's essay. He explained that in the preceding summer as he prepared to enter

college, his minister talked to him about the dangers he would encounter at college, particularly the dangers associated with professors who would try to lure him away from his religious faith and into what the student termed “secular humanism” and Satanism. The student told me that he was the first person in his family to attend college and that he appreciated greatly his minister’s guidance. Apparently, his minister told the young man and his friends that one of the “great lies” that would be foisted upon them dealt with the issue of dinosaurs, which, according to the minister, had never existed. Indeed, the minister claimed that professors worked “in the basement of the university” to fashion “dinosaur bones out of plaster of Paris” and would then “bury the bones for graduate students to find.” It was, according to the minister, a huge hoax perpetrated by university faculty on the entire world in order to force students to turn away from the beliefs of their parents and the church. The minister sternly warned the young man to rebuff any attempts by professors to strip away his religious beliefs.

I realized that day that my student was carrying a huge burden of false perceptions about higher education that was made even more cumbersome by the fact that he was a first-generation student. He had no one in his life to transmit to him the various rites of passage associated with college, except in the darkest and most distorted terms. Unfortunately, I reacted to the story with a mixture of disbelief and humor. Instead of trying to counsel the student, I told him that his minister had lied to him.

I never saw the young man again. He withdrew from the college and, as far as I know, did not return, at least not during my time at the school. The story the young man told me that day has remained in my memory for nearly 20 years because he provided me with a clear (albeit extreme) example of what it is like to enter college as a first-generation student.

Part of the reason I wanted to pursue this line of research is based on my own background as a first-generation student and my studies in the Educational Leadership program at ETSU. As a researcher, I would like to investigate ways to empower first-generation students with leadership skills that they can bring to their studies and future careers.

### Summary

Chapter 1 included an overview of the study, along with a statement of the problem (A term more appropriate to quantitative research), research questions, the significance of the study, and the scope of the study. The chapter also included information about the study site and the researcher's bias and reasons for pursuing the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Three general areas of research are pertinent to a qualitative study of the perceptions and experiences of first-generation college students in Southern Appalachia: research related to first-generation students generally, research related to Appalachian students specifically, and research related to first-generation students' educational and cultural transitions in higher education. Further, a brief review of literature related to qualitative research will help situate this study within its cultural and scholarly contexts. Much of the research on first-generation students and, particularly, Appalachian students is relatively dated and in need of fresh investigation.

#### First-Generation College Students

Recent quantitative research (Clauss-Ehlers, 2007; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzin, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1994) has focused on data regarding first-generation students' experiences in college; however, such data do not allow first-generation students to express their feelings about the experience of higher education, nor do they focus specifically on Appalachian students. DeCuir (2007) compared successful and unsuccessful first-generation college students in an exhaustive study that focused on psychosocial differences between the two groups. Boatsman (1999) argues that college exists as a mediating factor between one's culture of origin and one's eventual culture of social and career attainment. The study suggests that first-generation students choose different majors and make different career choices than students who are not first-generation and that first-generation students express more frustration with the system than other students. The results of the quantitative study highlight the need for schools to work with first-generation students early in their higher education studies to help them make



academic choices that will move them toward satisfying careers. The implication here is that first-generation students do not have adequate skills to make informed choices about majors and, ultimately, careers beyond college. In a similar study Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005) investigated issues of motivation among ethnic minority and first-generation students and found that parental and peer support were vital elements during the first year of study and the decision to return to school for the second year of study.

Likewise, Tinto (1993) focused on persistence of first-generation students in their first year as a predictor of success. Again, while certainly applicable to a study of first-generation students in Appalachia, none of these studies focused directly on such students. Regarding the first year of college, researchers (Paul & Brier 2001) have indicated that first-generation students must negotiate a “complex web of social and intellectual changes” (p. 77) that challenge their perceptions about both the culture of higher education and their home cultures in such a way as to make the first year the most important year in terms of personal growth and the acceptance of new intellectual and social paradigms. The challenges that first-generation students face in their first year of study can be mitigated to some degree by what Kuh and Love (2000) suggest is a “meaning-making system” (201) balanced with what they define as the “cultural difference” (p. 204) that students feel between their home culture and their host culture (college). Bul (2002) examined first-generation students who chose to begin their higher education at a university. He used a quantitative method to consider three aspects related to the parameters of the study: background characteristics of first-generation students, their reasons for attending the university, and their first-year experiences. His research indicated that first-generation students were more likely to be an ethnic minority, to come from a lower socioeconomic background, to speak a

language other than English at home, and to score lower on the SAT than were the other students.

Choy (2001) found that first-generation students were less likely to enroll in higher education when they graduated from high school. In a nation-wide study of high school seniors in 1992, Choy found that roughly a third of all graduating high school students could be classified as potential first-generation college student. Of this number, nearly half (49%) of the students were either only marginally qualified for higher education or were not qualified at all. The study compared first-generation students with students whose parents had at least some experience in higher education. Of those students whose parents had taken some college classes, a third (33%) were unqualified for higher education. Of those students whose parents earned bachelor's degrees, only about 15% were unqualified. Thus, the statistics suggest that a large number of first-generation students in higher education have significant academic deficiencies they must clear up before they can successfully tackle college-level work. Thayer (2000) widens the problem somewhat by arguing that first-generation students have limited access to information about college either from counseling services or from first-hand knowledge and information passed to them from friends and family. These burdens are then added to the already stressful atmosphere that characterizes higher education for all incoming students. Choy indicated that first-generation students received little help from their parents when it came to choosing a college or filling out application and financial aid forms.

Tinto (1988, 1993, 2000, 2003) has been a prolific researcher on the topic of why students choose to attend college and why they oftentimes choose to leave college early. While this study does not specifically deal with attrition rates among first-generation students, information about why students choose to leave college might shed some light on problems that

first-generation students experience during their initial experiences in higher education. For instance, Christie and Dinham (1991) found that students were more likely to withdraw from college if they did not feel integrated into the culture or if their values were significantly different from the perceived values of the college or university. Cushman (2007) researched many of the same issues and focused on difficulties first-generation students experienced. According to the researcher, “differences in income, social styles, and even speech patterns cause many first-generation students to feel like outsiders” (p. 45). Cushman also suggested—through her interviews with first-generation students—ways in which colleges and universities can better accommodate students who do not fit the norm. “The thorny issues of identity, privilege, and cultural understanding will continue to confront [first-generation students] as they make their toward college graduation. If educators support them in the task, first-generation students will emerge with a strong new identity as college-educated adults” (47).

### Appalachian Students

One of the defining criteria of the first-generation students in this study is their Southern Appalachian culture.

We mountain people are a product of our history and the beliefs of our forefathers. We are a traditional people, and in the isolated rural setting that was our home, we clung to the things of the past. Partly this was because, for so many years, we did not have much truck with the outside world. We became self-reliant. We sought our freedom from entanglements. We gained solitude, one of the things we cherish most of all. All of this was both our strength and our undoing. (Jones, 1991, p. 169)

Jones’s (1991) reference to both the strengths and the weaknesses of mountain life in Southern Appalachia can be applied to many of the problems that first-generation students face

when they enter into higher education. “Self-reliance” and “solitude” can keep a first-generation student from asking for help with confusing assignments or college bureaucracy. “Tradition” can both sustain and strangle a first-generation student as he or she engages with the new ideas and philosophies that infuse most courses during the first year of study. Similarly, a student’s home culture can influence his or her ability to function well in college (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Obermiller (1981) argues convincingly that Appalachia represents a distinct culture within the larger American culture, thus underscoring the idea that Appalachian, first-generation students bring with them defining elements of a culture that might not be familiar with or respect the transitions and passages that mark the process of higher education matriculation.

Gammell’s (2006) study, which comes closest in its conceptual framework to this study, indicated that very little research has been done on Appalachian students generally, which suggests that research in this area would benefit all students from Southern Appalachia, as well as those who specifically self-identify as first-generation. Gammell employed a grounded theory approach to interview first-year students in Appalachia and found that such students must process an array of unusual experiences in order to move through college successfully.

Jones (1991) described several Appalachian values that, as he termed it, indicate that the region “is similar to the value system of an earlier America” (p. 169). Among those values, he listed a strong sense of religion, individualism, self-reliance and pride, neighborliness and hospitality, family solidarity, love of place, modesty and being one’s self, sense of beauty, sense of humor, and patriotism (p. 170). For this study, a discussion of family solidarity and love of place will underscore many of the challenges that contemporary first-generation students face. Beaver (1991) described a specific community as part of her ethnographic research on the effects

of kinship and land ownership on rural Southern Appalachians. The values she described were very much in keeping with Jones and would certainly influence college students from the region. According to Beaver, “kinship is a cultural value, connecting the individual to other people, to land, to community, to history, and to identity” (p. 299). The idea of kinship is central to research that indicates the extent to which rural Appalachian families dominate one’s self-identity and worldview (Keefe, Reck, & Reck, 1983). As a researcher who calls Southern Appalachia home, I find some of the descriptions of “mountain people” to be dated, especially among younger, more urban Appalachian students; nevertheless, I also recognize areas of Southern Appalachia that still retain the distinct flavor of Jones’s and Beaver’s descriptions. Furthermore, descriptions of kinship and family dependence among Appalachian family members remains a strong influence on students from Appalachia, as I have seen in my own teaching experience. For instance, students will occasionally disappear for days or a week or more when family members become ill or must go to the hospital. In my own case as an instructor, I rarely receive advance notice of these disappearances; however, students assume that their absences will be excused. Further research on this topic might include a comparison of the perceptions of higher education among urban Appalachian students and rural Appalachian students. Another area of research might focus specifically on contemporary urban students from Appalachia and their perceptions of being described as Appalachian, as opposed to other descriptors such as “Southern” or “American.”

Batteau (Winter, 1979-80) found that Appalachian “culture” was created by two distinct forces that both define the region and place it at greater risk for exploitation.

In creating the illusion of a folk-like Appalachia, the metropolitan middle class found the idyllic relationships that it lacked in its daily life. It is a typical sequence in capitalist

society to create a poverty population, romanticize them as ‘folk’, and then import their precapitalist ‘folk’ qualities into its own symbolic production, even as the onslaught of commercialism is destroying the few genuine vestiges of folkways that remain. (p. 167)

Is it possible, then, to trace these same forces at work in first-generation students from Appalachia who find themselves walking a tightrope between cultures? A search for studies concerning Appalachian students brought up few works pertinent to this project. Rasheed (2001) used Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to analyze postsecondary school goals of Appalachian students, including attending college, pursuing vocational training, or entering full-time employment after high school. Sharif (1999) studied urban Appalachian students in Southwestern Ohio and focused on an ongoing problem of underachievement among these students. The study suggests that all levels of education—kindergarten through college—must actively engage families in order to help Appalachian students to move beyond negative cultural stereotypes regarding the efficacy of education. On the other end of the academic spectrum, Hayslette (2002) studied Kentucky’s Berea College and how the school has addressed specific issues related to Appalachian students, many of whom are first generation, and their transition to the academic, social, and cultural complexities of higher education. The study focused on specific practices at Berea that help students move toward earning degrees. In a similar study, Wolfe (1998) created an ethnographic study of a group of women attending a college in Appalachia. The study examined the women’s attitudes of and experiences with culturally responsive pedagogy designed to help them move toward graduation. The study is unique in its call for higher education to reflect upon its ingrained sexism, racism, and other social ills, including a dependence upon social stereotypes regarding typical Appalachian students.

Another ethnographic study (Cole, 1995) followed four Appalachian students, three of whom self-described as first-generation, into their first year of college. Through the students' stories of their experiences in college and back at home, the researcher was able to theorize that Appalachian culture encourages students to live bicultural lives. Moreover, the students relayed their struggles to assimilate into college culture and the difficulty they had returning home to their home culture. The students learned to structure their identities according to their environments with equal measures of success and failure. In particular, students described their problems with dialect. Once they learned to moderate their dialect to fit into their new college culture, they found that their families and friends derided their vocal changes as "elitist" and "uppity." From these studies, it is clear that first-generation Appalachian students face a steep learning and culture curve when they enroll in college.

#### Educational and Cultural Transitions

In "Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes," Bridges (1980) writes that there are three stages that mark a life-changing transition: endings, the neutral zone, and the new beginning. While the author focuses much of his work on difficult yet fulfilling transitions associated with college graduation, career choices, and lifestyle changes, much of his philosophy can be applied to the life changing transitions that can occur in college, especially for first-generation students from Southern Appalachia who find themselves in an entirely new kind of social and academic atmosphere, one that requires them to grow emotionally and intellectually in ways they might never have imagined in the past. In this sense, Bridges' three stages can be compared to Campbell's (1949) monomyth.

Along similar lines, Gammell (2006) argues that biculturalism, a feeling of existing in two different cultures normally applied to ethnic minorities in sociological and psychological

studies, can be applied to Appalachian students who feel as if college represents a cultural environment significantly different from their home culture and, thus, requires additional emotional and intellectual transitions in order to move through their studies successfully. The idea of biculturalism can be traced to various studies (Aranda, 1998; Gammell, 2006; Schonfeld, 2003) especially with regard to Hispanic and African American studies. In order to apply the theory to first-generation Appalachian students, however, one must assume that these students do, indeed, exist in a home culture that is significantly different from that of college when compared to students outside the Southern Appalachian region or to students whose parents or other family members attended college.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) assert that adjusting to college entails the complementary processes of desocialization and socialization. Desocialization is the changing or discarding of selected values, beliefs, and traits one brings to college in response to the college experience. Socialization is the process of being exposed to and taking on some of the new values, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives to which one is exposed at college. It is also the process of learning and internalizing the character, culture, and behavioral norms of the institution one is attending. Pascarella and Terenzini describe the transition from high school as a "culture shock involving significant social and psychological relearning in the face of encounters with new ideas, new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs, new freedoms and opportunities, and new academic, personal and social demands" (pp. 58 - 59). This culture shock is especially acute for those students who do not have siblings or parents who attended college.

Numbers alone can tell part of the story regarding the bicultural nature of first-generation college students in Appalachia. The Appalachian Region Commission (ARC), presents relevant 2000 Census data, including high school and college completion rates in Appalachia. Basically,



the Southern Appalachian region of Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina (which includes all of the Appalachian, first-generation students in this study) trails the U.S. averages on both high school completion (92.2%) and college completion (70.2%). According to the ARC website:

...42 percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population. The Region's economic fortunes were based in the past mostly on extraction of natural resources and manufacturing. The modern economy of the region is gradually diversifying, with a heavier emphasis on services and widespread development of tourism, especially in more remote areas where there is no other viable industry. Coal remains an important resource, but it is not a major provider of jobs. Manufacturing is still an economic mainstay but is no longer concentrated in a few major industries.

(Appalachian Region, 1999)

According to Drake (2001), The Appalachia Regional Commission was established to do two things: to provide educational and social services and to develop the infrastructure, including higher education, that would allow the region to prosper. The statistics do show that more Appalachian students currently attempt higher education; however, graduation rates are still low when compared with the nation as a whole, which serves as a reminder for those working with first-generation Appalachian students that there is still more to be done to encourage and support such students in their academic and career goals.

Perhaps one of the most difficult transitions for first-generation college students lies outside the classroom but weighs heavily on every aspect of college life. The cultural transitions that first-generation students face in college can be daunting. Aspects of their belief system come under question as they meet new people and entertain new, exciting, and sometimes quite

unnerving ideas about the world. Indeed, simply coming to terms with the fact that a world of cultures exists outside the rather insular culture of Southern Appalachia can be difficult for students to comprehend. Terenzini et al. (1996) found that compared to their peers first-generation students “completed fewer first-year credit hours, took fewer humanities and fine arts courses, studied fewer hours and worked more hours per week, were less likely to participate in an honors program, were less likely to perceive that faculty were concerned about students and teaching, and made smaller first-year gains on a standardized measure of reading comprehension” (p. 36).

Vargas (2004) studied types of “college knowledge” that first-generation students had available to them during the process of getting ready for college. He found that first-generation students, as well as those students classified as “low income” and “minority,” lack knowledge about preparing for college including financing a college education, completing various application processes associated with college, and seeing the connections between career goals and educational requirements. Likewise, Thayer (2000) found that first-generation students do not understand time management when balancing school-work and free time in college. They also do not appreciate the bureaucratic operations of higher education, which can make the process of navigating through higher education quite difficult.

Several researchers (Carter & Robinson, 2002; Gammell, 2006; Phinney & Chuateco, 2005; Thayer, 2000) indicated that first-generation college students face an array of problems that arise from lack of basic knowledge about the academic world of higher education and conflicts between college culture and home culture that make staying in college more of a challenge for these students than those students whose parents had at least some college experience. Striplin (1999) studied the effect of parents and family on first-generation students.

Families of first-generation students sometimes discourage them from pursuing college degrees for various reasons. Further, Striplin reported that first-generation students can easily feel intimidated by college and come to feel that they are not adequately prepared for the requirements of higher education. They feel that they are not “college material.” In a similar study, Hsaiao (1992) found that first-generation students have trouble establishing specific study time and that family members do not understand and sometimes criticize them for spending more time studying than attending to responsibilities within the family, especially if parents are paying tuition. Recent research (Cushman, 2007; Inkelas, 2007) has focused on intervention programs such as “living-learning” arrangements that help guide first-generation students through the traditional transitional phases of higher education including dealing with administrators, professors, and other students, balancing academic and social and family demands, and successfully negotiating career plans before and after graduation.

### Grounded Theory

Charmaz (2006) notes that practitioners of qualitative research disagree on the extent to which a literature review should be attempted prior to the process of data collection and coding. Early researchers (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) advocated delaying a substantive literature review until the analysis of data was completed; however, such an approach can be problematic for most research projects. Moreover, there is dissension among those who believe that a literature review should be limited. Dey (1999) and Layder (1998) regard the classical description of a limited literature review to be somewhat naïve and condescending. Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) suggest that grounded theory practitioners should adopt the stance of an agnostic researcher, which includes a critical view toward earlier theories

that is in line with Glaser's position that earlier theories should prove their validity and, thus, earn their way into current research.

The basic elements of grounded theory do suggest that an extensive literature review prior to analysis of data could impact the outcome of the study especially for novice researchers who might unconsciously allow earlier research to determine the direction of their research rather than allowing it to inform the scholarly context of the research project. Charmaz (2006) indicates that researchers should consider the constant comparison method to be appropriate for both data analysis and the review of literature (p. 165). A comparison of one's grounded theory with the relevant literature on the topic can highlight areas in which the new research extends, illuminates, or challenges earlier work. Charmaz argues that a properly designed literature review fulfills four general objectives for the finished study:

- It demonstrates one's knowledge of relevant research on the topic;
- It highlights one's ability to discuss salient issues within the relevant, extant research;
- It prompts the researcher to indicate "compelling connections" between earlier research and the current project; and
- It permits the researcher to make claims based on the emergent grounded theory. (p. 168)

Furthermore, a literature review should allow the researcher to both place the current project in the larger scholarly conversation about the topic and, at the same time, distinguish the project through its contribution to the existing knowledge of the topic. To that end, a researcher should strive to evaluate extant research rather than merely list a series of summaries (Charmaz, 2006, p. 168).

Grounded theory assumes that truth is based in and emerges from the data and its subsequent analysis. To that end, a qualitative researcher who bases his or her work in grounded

theory approaches truth as it exists in the lived experiences of people who are willing to share their stories. Meaning, then, is a construct of the data analysis rather than being a reflection of extant research. It is grounded in and emerges from data; hence, most qualitative researchers argue that all research projects are valid in that they invite people to share their subjective experiences of reality. In essence, even one substantive interview could, in theory, become the basis of a grounded theory research project.

There are many ways to approach a qualitative assessment of an educational phenomenon. I chose the grounded theory tradition as a primary methodology because I believe it is necessary for interviewees to feel free to tell their stories without any assumptions on the part of the interviewer. Likewise, as the researcher, I do not wish to enter into the interview process with rigid, *a priori* suppositions in place regarding the phenomenon. I believe that surprise is an essential ingredient in true qualitative research. Grounded theorists seek information that cannot be quantified or identified as “average.” My goal was to design an assessment to better understand the phenomenon of first-generation students from Southern Appalachia, and my literature review situates my study within the context of the available research concerning Southern Appalachian, first-generation college students and grounded theory as a research model.

### Summary

This study has been designed to further an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of first-generation college students from Southern Appalachia in order to make their time in college more effective and more pertinent to who they are as individuals. This chapter included a review of the current literature on first-generation college students, Appalachian students, educational and cultural transitions, and grounded theory as a means to understanding

what has been published in the various fields that constitute the theoretical background of this particular study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-generation students from Southern Appalachia perceive and process educational and social experiences that are part of higher education; therefore, a qualitative methodology was chosen to encourage students to tell their stories and share their realities about being first-generation college students. Little research has been undertaken to collect stories and experiences of such students as a means to understanding their place in higher education from a scholarly perspective. As such, this study was designed to explore Southern Appalachian, first-generation students' expectations and perceptions of higher education according to four research questions:

1. What were first-generation college students' perceptions of higher education academics and culture prior to enrolling in college?
2. Did family, friends, native culture, or a combination of the three influence first-generation students' expectations of higher education and their decision to pursue a college degree?
3. How do these students process the social and intellectual demands of higher education?
4. Did first-generation college students experience aspects of higher education that they would qualify as transformational?

#### Qualitative Grounded Theory

I specifically chose a qualitative methodology to encourage participants to tell their stories and share their realities about being first-generation college students. Because I wished to interpret the feelings, emotions, and thought processes of Southern Appalachian, first-generation

college students as expressed through their words—separate from my own personal, preconceived notions about the intent of study—I chose a grounded theory method that would allow for the emergence of data-driven theory that would “offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

According to scholars in the field (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the purpose of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory through an inductive process that emerges from a particular situation grounded in the experience and perceptions of the participants. It is a means by which researchers can come to a much deeper understanding of a phenomenon based on inferences from the data that inform one’s personal reality. Indeed, the grounded theory in this study reflects the cultural and educational experiences of a group of first-generation college students enrolled in a medium-sized university located in Southern Appalachia. The inferences from the data were grounded in the participants’ sense of reality as they discussed their perceptions and experiences of being first-generation college students.

### Data Collection

The study encompassed a single research site, East Tennessee State University, and focused on a specific group of first-generation students, those who had already finished at least one semester of college work. Moreover, I encouraged the participants to share specific college experiences that informed the central phenomenon. For instance, students oftentimes speak of their frustrations with higher education with regard to issues like the financial aid application process and the feeling that they are treated as nothing more than a number by some professors and administrators, especially on larger campuses (Belcheir, 2004).



To fully understand the perceptions and experiences of first-generation college students, I wanted to explore students' attitudes about higher education, both from their experiences as full-time students and from their experiences prior to entering college. Therefore, the primary research question for this study was: Do Southern Appalachian, first-generation college students' perceptions about college influence their decision to attend college and their experiences while in college?

### Sample

#### Participants

From a pool of 20 potential participants, 11 participants were contacted to be part of the study. Participants included currently enrolled students who were beyond their first semester of college work in order to allow for academic and social experiences to accrue that would inform the central phenomenon. Students represented a variety of academic majors and professional programs including nursing, math, English, education, psychology, and criminal justice. All participants were given the choice of using their first names or pseudonyms during the study.

The study employed the purposeful sampling procedures associated with the criterion method in order to assure the quality of the data from participants who could “contribute to the development of the theory” (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). The sampling criteria focused on first-generation students who were (a) currently enrolled full time and beyond their first semester of study. The sampling criteria also included students who were (b) from the Southern Appalachian region surrounding ETSU, namely, East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, or Western North Carolina, (c), and were within the traditional age range (18 – 24).

## Recruiting Protocol

After developing the sampling criteria and identifying the sampling frame, I began the process of locating potential students for the project. Students were chosen who had already experienced at least one semester as first-generation students. Prospective participants were given cursory information about the study along with contact information. Students were also chosen by the snowball sampling method, which is a process of encouraging established participants to lead the researcher to subsequent participants through their knowledge of those participants' experiences and attributes that match the stated sampling criteria (Merriam, p. 63). Instructors were located in the English department of the school because English departments typically work with the largest number of lower division students. Even though students were identified in English classes, the sampling method ensured a heterogeneous group of students majoring in the disciplines mentioned above.

From initial instructor contact, 20 potential participants responded and 11 were chosen according to the sampling criteria. I followed up the responses with emails outlining the study and the interview process. In the days leading up to the interviews, I contacted the participants by email or phone to remind them of the appointment. I also devised a back-up plan in case certain participants canceled interviews. The plan included phoning participants who had missed appointments, making new appointments, and, if necessary, using the snowball sampling method to recruit more participants from those students in the study who could lead the researcher to new participants.

## Informed Consent

I informed each participant about the parameters of the study and the importance of confidentiality. As part of the initial interview process, I asked participants to sign an informed

consent form, which included permission to use participants' words as quotes in the final research report. Furthermore, I explained to all participants that every attempt would be made to protect their anonymity during the research phase and for the life of the project by using fictitious names and avoiding specific descriptors that might identify a particular person. Nevertheless, I also warned participants that unintentional identification based on quoted material or descriptions is possible. Participants read and signed the informed consent form at the beginning of the interview process. Moreover, I reminded the participants periodically throughout the interview process that their participation was voluntary and that they could drop out of the study if they so desired without fear of harassment or penalty.

#### Interview Protocol

Each participant was interviewed at a local restaurant near the university or in a quiet classroom on campus according to individual participants' wishes. As the interview process began, I apprised the participants of the purpose of the study, reminded them of the confidentiality process, and asked them to sign an informed consent form as described above. I also explained that the interview would be digitally recorded and asked if the participant felt comfortable with the process. Finally, I introduced each participant to the scribe, a fellow, IRB-certified researcher who was present to take notes and insure internal validity of the interview process.

Once introductions were completed, I turned on the recorder and asked the participant again for oral permission to record the session. As the interview began, I relied upon an interview script that included four main questions designed to encourage the participants to speak openly about their experiences as first-generation college students. In order to help students feel comfortable with the interview process and to initiate a deep exploration of the

thoughts of each participant, I employed an unstructured interview format. Impromptu probing questions allowed participants to fill in conversations with more in-depth information and to clarify various responses. Each of the four main questions was designed to help participants share their perceptions of and experiences with higher education before they enrolled in college and during their first few semesters of study.

### Interview Questions

The official interview guide (See Appendix A) included a “grand tour” question, an “example” question, an “introspection” question, and an “experience” question based upon the researcher’s own questions regarding the phenomenon. Initial probes included “mini-tour” questions to help participants explore their feelings regarding college life as a first-generation student. The guiding questions were as follows:

- Imagine that it is your very first day on campus as an incoming freshman. What were you feeling as you walked to your first college class?
- Describe how your family and friends reacted to your decision to come to college. Did they support you? How do they act now that you have completed a few semesters of college work?
- Have your experiences in college changed the way you think about yourself? Do you think that other people perceive a change in you now that you are a college student?
- Imagine that I am a high school senior. I plan to attend college in the fall and will be a first-generation student. What advise would you give me about my freshman year?

### In-Depth Interviews

Charmaz (2006) suggests that interviewing is a “flexible, emergent technique” that allows interviewers to pursue ideas and issues as they emerge (p. 29). With that proviso in mind, I

decided upon an interview plan that would allow as much exploration of the phenomenon as possible with the participants. Each personal interview lasted approximately 1 hour, with follow-up, email questions if necessary in order to build on the various issues that emerged from each interview. Each participant signed an informed consent form prior to the initial interview, and all interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed by an IRB certified transcriptionist, whose job it was to transcribe the taped interviews verbatim into a text that could be used for the coding process. An IRB-certified auditor checked the transcriptions against notes taken during the interviews to make sure that the transcription process was complete.

### Ethical Protocol

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were of paramount importance to insure that all participants were aware of the intent of study and the parameters of their participation. Prior to any data collection, I undertook IRB (Institutional Research Board) certification and submitted the research proposal for IRB approval. Further, the scribe and transcriptionist were also IRB certified. The scribe was a fellow researcher who sat in on the interviews to take notes about the process and to make sure that all ethical standards were met.

In recruiting participants, I considered that some students might harbor negative associations with the designation of “first-generation.” To alleviate potential ethical problems associated with branding, I did not initiate contact with students about participating in the study until their instructors had described the project in class and had invited potential participants to take part in the study. Moreover, all participants were reminded several times throughout the study that their participation was voluntary – informed consent was viewed as an ongoing process instead of a ‘one time event’ -- and that they could elect to leave the study at any time without recrimination. Participants were also informed that should they elect to leave the study,

their interview tapes and transcripts would be destroyed and none of their interview material would be used in the final research report.

All participants were informed that their interview tapes and transcripts would be held in strictest confidence under lock and key for 5 years. Furthermore, students were reminded that their anonymity would be upheld throughout the research process and for the life of the research study. Finally, all participants reviewed their interview transcripts and were encouraged to make any corrections necessary prior to the coding process.

### Data Analysis

Throughout the interview process, I practiced what Creswell (2007) terms a “zigzag” pattern of interviewing and coding that is part of the grounded theory method espoused by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Building upon the constant comparison model, I began the open coding process by extracting major categories of information from each transcript and recording memo statements about the open codes as part of the initial analysis. According to Strauss and Corbin, memo statements are analytical and conceptual notes about the information gleaned from the coding process, starting with the very beginning stages of analysis. Memos evolve and increase in complexity and richness as the research process proceeds, and they oftentimes amend or negate earlier memos. In effect, memos allow researchers to “gain analytical distance” (p. 218) from the raw data and move toward a more nuanced, scholarly understanding of the material. Charmaz (2006) suggests that memos are like private conversations the researcher has with himself or herself during the intermediate step between data collection and the first draft of a project (p. 72).

### Coding and Verification

Once the open coding process was finished with each transcript, I began the second step in the process, the creation of axial codes that surrounded and further defined the open codes. At the same time, the auditor verified the open coding process by open coding two transcripts to compare with my work. The internal auditor met with me to compare codes and discuss any differences to insure the validity of the interpretation process.

During the axial coding process I developed a coding paradigm (Creswell, 2007) to link the categories and organize the open codes into a more defined phenomenon. From the developing central phenomenon a theoretical framework emerged that I could develop while grounding the resulting theory in the experiences of the participants.

In the next step of the coding process I began the process of selective coding to integrate the axial codes and move toward a more refined theory based upon the resulting theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). I tested the theoretical scheme for density and reviewed any remaining special codes. In the final theory I reported superfluous cases in order to strengthen the validity of the study and to add detail to the study.

In order to make sure that the generated theory was, in fact, influenced by the voices heard throughout the interview process, I invited all participants to do a member check of the entire process from transcripts to generalized theory. Several participants agreed to the member check, but not all did. As a result an auditor reviewed the research process to further ensure the validity of the study.

### Quality and Verification

Merriam (1998) reminds researchers that they are the "primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p.7) in all qualitative research, which hints at the possibility of

problems with internal and external validity. Creswell (2007) argues convincingly that qualitative researchers should establish a unique system of validation and reliability separate from the traditional, positivist perspective of quantitative research. Building upon a host of researchers' findings, Creswell presents his own theories about validation and reliability as follows. Regarding validity, Creswell details eight strategies based upon his own earlier research:

- “Prolonged engagement and persistent observation”: The notion that lengthy engagement and observation will help ensure the validity of the research.
- Triangulation: Making use of different sources, research methods, theories, and investigators to corroborate evidence.
- Peer review and debriefing: The process of opening the research to a peer who can view the findings with an objective eye and ask questions that will assist the researcher in making the research accessible and valid.
- Negative case analysis: The process of refining research hypotheses according to “negative or disconfirming evidence” (p. 205).
- Clarification of researcher bias: Making sure that readers understand researcher’s biases that might effect the interpretation of the data and the design of the research project.
- Member check: Allowing participants to view and comment on the research findings and interpretation.
- Rich, thick description: Finely detailed descriptions of the participants and/or research situation that allow readers to determine the transferability of the findings to other situations.



- External audits: Audits of the research methodology and the research findings by an outside, objective consultant to make sure that the findings are supported by the data as part of the reliability of the study.

Merriam (1998) similarly suggests that qualitative research should be rigorously and ethically conducted in such a way as to “ring true to readers, educators, and other researchers” (p. 199). Merriam argues further that qualitative research is too contextual and subjective for traditional, positivist standards of reliability and should, instead, be judged according to internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to “how research findings match reality” (p. 201), whether what is reported matches what has been truly heard during the interviews and subsequent analysis. External validity refers to “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, p. 207). Of the two forms, external validity is the more problematic because most qualitative researchers eschew the theory of “generalizability” as being too representative of quantitative inquiry. Merriam suggests that writing rich, thick description, highlighting the comparability or typicality of a subject, and increasing the diversity of the research design will underscore the external validity of a project (pp. 211-12). The fact that a particular qualitative research study cannot be precisely replicated does not discredit the original study. Indeed, researchers’ inability to replicate particular studies’ precise findings highlights the individual, subjective, post-positivist nature of qualitative research.

### Reporting the Findings

Qualitative research demands that research respect the individual perceptions and subsequent words of participants in a naturalistic design. Therefore, findings are reported with thick, rich description that captures honestly and completely the individual realities of those who

have taken part in the study in order to generate sound theory about the phenomenon. The full analysis of the data constitutes chapter four.

### Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology and the research design that were used to investigate perceptions of first-generation, Southern Appalachian college students of the academic and cultural experiences of higher education. A qualitative, grounded theory approach was used for data collection and analysis. Interviews were used to generate theory about the following research questions:

1. What were first-generation college students' perceptions of higher education academics and culture prior to enrolling in college?
2. Did family, friends, and native culture influence first-generation students' expectations of higher education and their decision to pursue a college degree?
3. How do these students process the social and intellectual demands of higher education?
4. Did first-generation college students experience aspects of higher education that they would qualify as transformational?

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Constant comparison theory demands that researchers focus their attention on what Strauss and Corbin (1998) call a “microscopic analysis” or “microanalysis” of data (p. 57). The emphasis, likewise, in qualitative research is on a rhetorical analysis of words and phrases that make up the narrative. From my perspective as a researcher with a background in literary studies and storytelling, I am keenly aware of the power of narrative. The stories these students tell me are rich with character and heritage. The stories are made up of experiences, perceptions, and expectations that go far beyond anything that a quantitative study might reveal about these students, which is why the biography section includes thick description of each student. It is important to remember that the students were sharing their stories—intact, connected narratives—rather than bits of data.

This study included interviews with 11 students who were enrolled at ETSU during the spring semester of 2009. Each of the students was enrolled in either a first-year writing course or a sophomore literature course in the English department. None of the students had to take a developmental studies writing course; although, some students did have to enroll in a developmental studies math course. Of the 11 students interviewed for this study, 8 chose ETSU without applying to other institutions of higher education. They were confident enough of being admitted to the school that they did not see the need to apply elsewhere. Moreover, they were assured by the geography of ETSU and East Tennessee that they would be able to maintain their relationships with members of their home culture, particularly family and friends. For all of the students, perceptions of higher education have been defined through the lens of their home cultures, including their high school teachers and friends. For most of the students, first-

generation status and Southern Appalachian culture were not foremost in their minds until the interviews for this project. Further, most of the students were ambivalent about the transformative aspects of a university education and college culture generally.

### The Participants

Traditional qualitative research does not require the researcher to identify or describe participants as part of the data analysis; however, some researchers (Charmaz, 2001; Gammell, 2006; Rudestam & Newton, 2001) suggest that readers appreciate descriptions of the people who have shared their stories for the research project. As part of the research process, I asked each student if he or she minded being described in the text. None of the students objected. In fact several students encouraged me to tell their stories with as much descriptive detail as possible. Nevertheless, the students were given pseudonyms to insure their anonymity. Their biographies are listed according to the order in which they were interviewed.

#### Audrey

Audrey is from Bakersville, North Carolina and takes advantage of the savings on tuition that ETSU has set up with the western counties of that state. She is a nursing major. Like most of the students in this study, Audrey depends upon her family for emotional support during her years in school. She is especially close to her grandmother, who has encouraged her to pursue a degree in nursing. Audrey was the first student I interviewed for this project, and her answers became touchstones for much of the information I gleaned from other interviews. For instance, Audrey commented on her use of technology to keep in touch with her family and friends. She talked about the fact that she communicates with members of her family on a regular basis. Audrey also mentioned that her grandmother, who is a Certified Nursing Attendant (CNA), encouraged her to work toward a nursing degree in order to “do better” in life, a theme that was

prevalent in nearly every interview for this project. In two other instances, Audrey referred to being “pushed” to attend college by guidance counselors and family members, which is similar in tone to what several other students shared with me about their decisions to attend college. In the interview, however, Audrey made it clear that going to college was a given in her life that she appreciated. Audrey’s overall feelings about college were positive, and she looked forward to what her future would hold thanks to higher education.

### Janet

Janet is from a small town in the mountains of Southeast Tennessee near Chattanooga. She found ETSU by accident but is happy that she enrolled. She commented that she “liked ETSU because it’s not too big and it’s not too small. It seemed just right....” Janet is a sophomore psychology major with a concentration in behavioral neuroscience. Unlike the other students, Janet was clear in her dislike of her home community. In fact, she talked about moving her mother and siblings to the Johnson City area. Her antipathy toward her home community was based in what she described as the extreme poverty, racism, and sexism of the area in which she grew up. Once Janet finished talking about her home community, her mood brightened considerably as we moved to topics related to her studies at ETSU. Of all the students I interviewed, Janet seemed to be the most overtly grateful for her new home at ETSU. She described cultural opportunities offered by the school as well as service learning opportunities abroad that she would like to experience. For Janet, ETSU was a very positive step away from her past life and toward a promising future. Janet is the one student from Tennessee who did not grow up in the general vicinity of ETSU and would not have automatically chosen ETSU for reasons of proximity to home culture. In that regard, Janet’s reactions were closer to those of students from Western North Carolina, Southwest Virginia, and Eastern Kentucky.

## Bob

Bob is from Elizabethton, Tennessee and is an English major with a strong desire to be a filmmaker. He was a freshman at the time of the interview, and he was definitely the comedian of the group, or, more precisely, the optimist of the group. His jovial nature came through clearly in our discussions as he described his desire to study film and literature and how his parents feel about his academic choices. Throughout our conversation, we laughed several times at Bob's small jokes. Even in his humor, Bob reacted honestly and openly about his early experiences at ETSU and his perceptions about what college was supposed to mean to him. When talking about his high school teachers, Bob mentioned their stories about college: "They kind of intimidate you about college. So, it's no wonder Tennessee has such a low graduation rate." Interestingly, Bob mentioned that his college classes ended up being less intensive than he thought they would be, a sentiment shared by several of the first-generation students in this study. As a film minor, Bob also commented on his perceptions of college based on movies and television:

It was a big relief to find that college isn't so much like what you see in the movies and on TV. At the same time, it sort of grounded me, it's all up to me. It's all on me to do well instead of depending on someone to help me. It's basically my responsibility to get an education for myself.

Bob's description of his responsibility to educate himself would find form in what other students had to say about their "opportunity" or "chance" to attend college and would end up being one of the more fascinating secondary themes in this study.

## Patrick

Patrick is from Rogersville, Tennessee and grew up familiar with ETSU athletics. At the time of the interview, he was 19 years old and a sophomore pre-business major who spent his

first year of college in a private school before moving to ETSU for financial reasons. “I had to transfer here cause it’s something I could afford to pay for. And it’s only about an hour away from home so it’s convenient. It keeps my mother happy.” Patrick lives in a rented house near campus and visits his parents every few weeks. Patrick’s father did not trust higher education and tried to persuade Patrick not to attend college in the first place; however, Patrick’s mother supported his decision. Many of Patrick’s friends from high school chose ETSU because they thought they could take large auditorium classes that did not have attendance policies. Patrick looked for the smaller classes in order to get a better education. “I wanted to feel like I could approach the professor and ask a question. I don’t talk much in class, but I do like the smaller classes.” The fact that Patrick’s father has had a difficult time accepting Patrick’s transition to higher education has to some degree affected Patrick’s overall views of college life. During the interview Patrick appeared intense and focused. At times he appeared to be distracted and uncomfortable with the information he was giving me, as if I were infiltrating his private world. His somewhat laconic replies to the interview questions suggested that Patrick, himself, has some reservations about higher education that might be the result of his father’s initial lack of support. Nevertheless, Patrick has continued his studies and will graduate at the end of the spring semester of 2011.

### Sherry

Sherry did not enroll at ETSU first. She began her higher education in a community college near ETSU. She grew up in Greenville, Tennessee, but she also lived in Western North Carolina with relatives for some time before going to college. She is an education major and looks forward to going back to her community to teach high school English. Sherry had only recently transferred to ETSU to finish her degree when I interviewed her. She chose ETSU for

the sake of convenience—she can be close to her parents and other family members—and because she was already familiar with the campus. In describing her first day, Sherry shared a story that many students experience:

I was very nervous. I got to school probably 2 hours early to find a parking spot because I heard it was horrible to park and I walked for awhile past the Mini Dome and then I found a closer parking spot on down. So, now I'm good.

Sherry also shared a fear that many students share about the university setting:

I thought [classrooms] would be auditorium size. I had already looked to see how many would be in the class but I still figured I would be in an auditorium somewhere, sometime and that scares me still.

Regarding her decision to attend ETSU, Sherry listed three solid components of her decision that made it right for her.

Small classroom sizes, being close to home, and being able to take my first semester with my best friend and my cousin. It was a transition, like that [community college] was my upper high school and now I'm in college, is what I felt like. I took high school and then I went to an upper level high school and now I'm in college.

Sherry knew from her parents that she would have to go to college to get some sort of degree. Her parents did not give her any specific advice about college or what to study, but they made it clear that she was not going to spend her life working in retail or fast food. To her own credit, Sherry recognized that she was growing intellectually through her studies.

I've bettered myself. My knowledge has grown a lot and from high school. I didn't learn anything in high school. I mean it was like starting a blank page when I started college. It was totally new and that's where I began my learning experience.



Nevertheless, Sherry was pragmatic about college. She knew what she wanted from ETSU and was doing what she had to do to attain her goal as evidenced by her final question to me: “Does this get me my extra credit?”

### Theresa

Theresa is a soft-spoken young woman who is a sophomore at ETSU studying business. She was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, but her parents—both from the mountains of Western North Carolina—brought her to the area to live when she was a toddler. Her family now lives in Mountain City, Tennessee, near the border with North Carolina. Her grandfather lives in the mountains of Western North Carolina, and Theresa visits with him as often as she can. She currently lives in Johnson City, but she returns to her hometown on most weekends. Even though she was born outside the area, Theresa considers herself fully Appalachian because of her family.

My grandparents lived here so we decided to move over with them. Actually, the main thing was my uncle. His wife got breast cancer so there was no one to really take care of their kids. So that was really the main reason that we moved here.

Like many people in traditional Appalachian culture, a serious illness requires that family members be present to take care of their own. Theresa’s family is no different. When asked about her decision to go to college, Theresa responded:

I just knew I was going to college. I seen [sic] the kind of lives that my parents had and I wanted more and I wanted to get that through education. Cause that was the only way to get more money and I kept my grades up in high school so I could get scholarships so that I could go to college. So it was important from the get go for me.

When speaking about her adopted Appalachian culture, Theresa spoke lovingly about her grandfather’s life in Western North Carolina. He rented a small house and did not have

electricity until just a few years ago. Theresa enjoyed spending time with her grandfather and learning about her Appalachian heritage:

I'm glad I got to experience that because kids these days they don't really...they're like, what? no power? But I feel glad that I got to experience that and know a little bit like how it used to be and how it is today. So I think it's really important that we instill values then and now to the younger generation.

For Theresa Appalachian heritage is an important part of her definition of self. She sees herself returning home to Mountain City after graduation to work, as a means of returning something of value to her community, a strong trait associated with first-generation Appalachian students.

My grandparents have beliefs that they will never change, no matter what. They like to do stuff in a more simple way. They don't have internet or, you know, they try to live life how their grandparents did it, and they want us to see that people worked hard back then and you have to work hard today. You know, education to them is really important for me to have because they didn't have it and they want me to have a better life, but they still...they want me to hold on to the values that their generation had, our whole family has had.

Theresa's family's desire that she get an education to have "a better life" is a major theme that arose from the interviews and is intertwined with the pragmatism with which Theresa and the other students view their work at ETSU.

### Laura

At 22, Laura is the oldest of the students interviewed for this project. She is a "proud Appalachian woman" from the Bristol area and a single, working mom who is also a full-time education major at ETSU. Because of her hectic schedule, it was difficult to schedule a time for a

traditional interview with Laura. At one point I suggested that she withdraw from the project, but Laura was determined to tell her story. In the end we communicated primarily via email.

Laura looks forward to teaching high school English and drama. She also shared her desire to write about life in Appalachia in the same vein as authors such as Lee Smith and Annie Dillard. In order to work and go to school, Laura depends upon her mother and aunts for childcare. Like many of the other students in this study, Laura commented on the “wonderful opportunity” ETSU gives her to further her education and how it allows her to someday help her family and look after her parents. In an email to me nearly a month after our initial email exchange Laura wrote:

I suppose I also identify myself as Appalachian because I am so proud to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century Appalachian woman. I am not the stereotype as much as I claim some concepts related to the stereotypical definition. I am not raw-boned and do not have either five kids or a no good husband. I have never handled a snake for a religious purpose and I do not go barefoot unless I am walking around the pool. I am not either blessed with unparalleled knowledge of wildlife or common sense or am I ignorant of book knowledge.

Laura’s description of being a “21<sup>st</sup> century Appalachian woman” would prove to be one of the more intriguing comments regarding Appalachian culture in the study and one that was at odds with several of the students’ views on Appalachia. Perhaps it was her age or her experiences that fueled her descriptions, but Laura definitely stood out among the various students I interviewed for the conviction of her ideas and the strength behind her motivation to succeed in college.

### Nathan

Nathan was a freshman at ETSU at the time of the study. He is studying sports medicine

and hopes to go on to medical school. He grew up within walking distance of ETSU and considered the campus his “backyard” before enrolling as a student. In fact Nathan never thought about going anywhere else to study. As an interviewee, Nathan brought a keen sense of energy and motivation to our conversation. He didn’t hesitate to let me know exactly what he thought of various aspects of higher education. For instance, regarding the experience of being a first-generation student, Nathan commented:

I feel that if anything I have an advantage over students who have had their parents go to school cause I feel like I just have that more of a push to me to be able to graduate and be the first person in my family to get a degree from school. Being the youngest and last person to be able to in this generation I just feel like if I do that then I’ll have the bragging rights and everything like that, so it just kinda really motivates me to be able to do it.

Nathan was very confident about his ability to do well in college.

I’d always said my whole goal was to go to school, get a good education, and play sports in college. I turned down my athletic scholarships that way I could go to ETSU and just strictly focus on academics. But I’ve known my whole life, my parents are pretty much, I’ve talked to my parents my whole life. They always said just go to school and get you a good college education and make you some money one day, be successful. So that’s always been my goal and their goal for me.

The idea of making money and being successful is a crucial ingredient in the pragmatism that informs Nathan’s view of college, and it is a defining element of much of what the other students told me during their interviews. They are at ETSU to further their prospects in life.

## Rachel

Rachel was a 20-year-old sophomore from Southwest Virginia who studied environment science at ETSU for approximately 1 year. She was the only student who expressed regret about choosing ETSU. She moved to Johnson City from Pound, Virginia and had decided to return there by the time I interviewed her. As our conversation moved along, Rachel shared her concerns about being a student at ETSU. She did not like the program of study she had chosen, and she felt ill at ease with the people of East Tennessee generally. For Rachel, the switch from her small hometown to the relative brisk pace of Johnson City was too much. Rachel filled her comments with homespun references to life in Appalachia, including her definition of what it means to be Appalachian, a term she says can be applied to Southwest Virginia but not necessarily East Tennessee.

Rachel lived on campus in a single room and did not socialize with many of the other students on her dormitory floor. She looked forward to her occasional visits home to Southwest Virginia. “This whole region is too fast for me. I like being back in the mountains on my grandpa’s land riding my horse.” For Rachel being Appalachian is an integral part of her life experience, and she cannot quite fathom the apparent lack of Appalachian culture in Johnson City. “I suppose it’s the size of the city or something, but it’s not like home. You just have like a different set of values if you’re Appalachian. Like even compared to Johnson City people here, when I came here it was total culture shock.” Rachel has since moved back to her family home in Southwest Virginia.

## Maggie

Maggie grew up in East Tennessee but did not consider ETSU when she thought of college even though she grew up near the campus and knew about activities associated with the

school. She wanted to study outside the area but decided on ETSU when she considered her finances and her family, which she described as her “safety net.” She is an education major. At the time of the interview, Maggie lived on campus, which, according to her, was a practical necessity because she did not have a car. She had borrowed her parents’ car, but she couldn’t keep it on campus. As she put it, she did not want to be “a burden” on her parents. As we talked, Maggie experienced one of the more remarkable episodes in this study, an epiphany, based upon what she had described to me about her first year of study, that brought home the fact that she is a true college student. After the episode, Maggie’s demeanor changed noticeably, and she appeared very confident and comfortable in her “new” role as college student.

Early in the interview Maggie described her early days on campus as painful and lonely. She did not have courses with friends and felt somewhat alienated by the whole experience. Nevertheless, she came to believe she “belonged” on campus, that it was the right thing to do, even though she felt out of place at first. For Maggie her high school teachers were her primary cheerleaders when it came to the decision to go to college. She recalled one teacher who said quite simply, “you can do this,” which was a prime motivator for Maggie to take the requisite exams and fill out the forms to get into college. Maggie also commented on the things her high school teachers didn’t tell her or misrepresented to her, such as the amount of time necessary to study and attendance policies. In the end, however, Maggie appears to be at home as a college student and is happy that she made the choice to enroll.

### Jonathan

Jonathan grew up in Pikeville, Kentucky and considered going to Pikeville College before being offered a scholarship to play soccer at ETSU. Like several of the students in this study, Jonathan did not place much emphasis on being a first-generation student or, for that

matter, being from Appalachia even though he did comment on the natural beauty of the mountains surrounding his hometown:

I miss being able to step outside my back door and into the woods behind my parents' home. My family has lived on that land as far back as my great grandfather, and I've known the trails and caves and waterfalls there all of my life.

For Jonathan much of his Appalachian heritage is associated with the land he grew up on and still considers part of his "home." Jonathan also told me about a yearly event in Pikeville that he finds funny yet vaguely insulting:

Ever year in April, they do Hillbilly Days in Pikeville to raise money for some charity. It's sorta funny and a big deal. Thousands of people show up, and the Shriners dress up like hillbillies to raise money. They kinda make fun of hillbillies, but there's lots of things to do. I usually go hunting that weekend.

I asked Jonathan to comment further on the part about making fun of hillbillies.

They're raising money for some children's hospital, but they make hillbillies look stupid and rough. It's demeaning. I guess I'm a hillbilly, but I don't dress that way or drink moonshine all the time. I just don't like seeing people dress up like clowns to make people laugh at people in Appalachia.

Other students would make similar comments about stereotypes associated with Appalachian people.

When I asked Jonathan about his work at ETSU, he became less animated. For Jonathan ETSU is a stepping-stone toward a bright future. At the time of the interview Jonathan had not declared a major, so his "bright future" wasn't as focused as that of other students in the study. Jonathan did not attend any presemester events when he was a freshman and did not participate

in any cultural activities on campus except events that were required for courses. For the most part, he hung out with his soccer friends in the dorm.

When Jonathan talked about his parents, he said that they told him to have fun in college and call home if he needed anything. And when I asked him about things that ETSU could do to strengthen the experience for first-generation students, he drew a blank. In fact most of Jonathan's answers were short and to the point, except for his descriptions of the natural landscape around his home.

Unlike the other students in this study, Jonathan seemed ill at ease with the interview process. As such, I did not push him to expand on his statements as much as I did with other students. When the interview was over, Jonathan was visibly relieved and left quickly. I emailed Jonathan after the interview to ask him a few follow up questions, but he did not get back in touch with me.

### The Interviews

As part of the interview process each student responded to four main interview questions and several impromptu questions based on the direction of each interview. This section details information gleaned from the main questions and the impromptu questions when appropriate. The interview transcripts are available in Appendix D.

Question 1: *Imagine that it is your very first day on campus as an incoming freshman. How did you feel about your first day on campus? What were you feeling as you walked to your first college classes?*

Like nearly all college students, the first-generation students in this study commented on their first day of college as being emotionally difficult and confusing. Patrick compared his first day of college to high school:



It was like starting high school all over again. Not knowing anybody, looking for people to know but it's kind of an overwhelming feeling but then at the same time it was like you know this is something that I'm going to be glad I did in a couple of years.

Theresa echoed Patrick when she spoke about her first day:

It was much different than I expected. I guess I don't know it was so new and I've moved around a lot so I've been to a bunch of different schools but college is a whole new experience. You think everyone is going to be staring at you, you're saying 'aw look there's a freshman' but no it's funny because no one knows if you're a freshman or a senior. The professors were a lot nicer actually than I expected them to be... I guess I was a little bit overwhelmed but not as much as I expected to be. I think I had it under control.

Janet used even stronger words to describe her experience:

Um, I was absolutely terrified because my High School only (inaudible) the high school and middle school combined there were only 315 students and in my graduating senior class there were only 48 students. And a very small building and I was just absolutely terrified cause I knew my first class would be huge, I had no idea where I was going. I wasn't used to having to walk so far to get to class cause it's all in one building I was just I was lost. I almost started crying. (laugh) It was very traumatic but I got through it.

Bob echoed what others had to say about the experience:

Oh, totally nerve-wracking. Because I was so not ready. ETSU is like its own little city, and everyone is so intense the first day. I didn't know where I was going, so I was just hoping I'd find the right place and all. And like everyone has this perception of college as being completely impossible when they are in high school, so I was kind of scared and stuff.

Nathan was more philosophic in his memories of his first days at ETSU:

You have a lot larger classes than high schools when I walked into two auditorium classes in one day I was really shocked about that and I guess throughout all of your education before this you're with everybody your same age. And whenever you get to college there's people who in my class that could've been my father's age or older than my father. I've seen people who could be my grandparent's age. So that's a lot different as well. And then the professor, the teachers, professors, both just act; they're so much difference in them and their attitudes than there is in high school. Cause high school they feel like they're your guardian for the day. Whereas the professor and teacher is just there to teach you.

Sherry commented on how she arranged her schedule:

It's funny because me and my cousin are three months apart and we scheduled all of our classes together because we were both so scared of college. So we had the exact same classes for a whole semester.

Audrey described being scared and excited at the same time:

I guess it was more overwhelming yet exciting at the same time to have the opportunity to go to school, which was something that I didn't feel like I could have had if it wouldn't have been for like several people in my life really pushing me and helping me get to that point. So, I guess overwhelming and excitement, yet nervous, too when I got there.

Maybe fear of not succeeding, or something like that.

Rachel attended a community college before enrolling at ETSU, but her initial experience at ETSU was similar to what other students described:

Mostly I was just kinda scared cause I didn't know where I was going. Cause all the buildings were so huge compared to our little high school. It was tiny and so the college was huge so I just had problems finding where I was going but after that it was I loved it it was way times better than the high school. I didn't really like high school at all but I loved community college. Even opposed to this college I like community college better.

Laura felt prepared for the academic part of her first day, but she didn't realize how lonely she would feel without her friends around her:

I felt very prepared, um, for my first college class. I had AP courses in high school and I felt AP courses were even more advanced than college classes. It was still a rough day, though. I didn't see any of my friends. They weren't in any of my classes. So I pretty much spent the entire day without talking to anyone essentially, and it was raining that day. In fact, it rained every Tuesday and Thursday of the first month I was there. Bad days (laughter). And, um, that first day I just cried because I was so lonely. I mean I did get used to it eventually, but that first day it was especially rough.

Both Maggie and Jonathan commented on being nervous on the first day and how they had trouble finding classrooms.

According to these students the first day of classes at ETSU can feel quite overwhelming, which is to be expected from most students, even those whose parents and other relatives attended college. What makes the experience especially poignant for first-generation students, however, is the fact that they do not have stories from parents and relatives to fall back on as they experience the first days of college. They must navigate the experience by themselves, which is what most of the students in this study did.

Question 2: *Describe how your family and friends reacted to your decision to come to college. Did they support you? How do they act now that you have completed some college work?*

Rachel's reaction to this question was most memorable to me because Rachel was going through her own form of withdrawal from the school as we talked:

At first my grandma she didn't really like it. She wanted me to go to college but she didn't like that I was moving away cause we were like best friends. But she's really proud of me and wants me to keep going on. And my grandpa, he was a little hesitant at first he wanted me to get a job somewhere.

Regarding her grandfather, Rachel commented that he "wanted me to get a job cause I guess that's where he's always had a job. He just wanted me to get a job and go right into it."

Patrick's parents were split in their support. His mother wanted him to get a college education, but his father wanted him to stay in Rogersville and work in the family carpet cleaning business: "I guess I was just kinda supposed to take over his business like it's very cliché but that's basically how it was."

Theresa's parents were more ambiguous in their support: "They... wanted me to but they kinda left it up to me. But then again they also knew that I wanted to and I was gonna go. I was going to find a way."

Janet, who described her background as being poverty-stricken, made it clear that her mother, a single parent, encouraged Janet to go to college:

...she had always said, "[Janet], I want you to go to college but it's your decision, but I'd like for you to. I want better things for you than this life." She always kinda drilled it that I needed to go to college.

Recalling her friends' choices, Janet mentioned that most did not go on to college:

I'm one of the only ones that actually went to college and stuck with it. The rest of them are either married and have babies and are working at some dead end job. And they don't have any you know bright outlook. They don't see anything more for themselves.

Her friends don't understand why Janet would choose to attend ETSU:

They think I'm crazy but they're like "I don't know how you can go so far away from home." Cause it's three and a half hours away, where I live. And they're like I don't know how you can do it, I can't handle not seeing my family and I can't handle devoting all my time to school.

Janet was even less complimentary about her other family members:

...my family is so strange. They're very old fashioned and very "women are dogs" type thing, like my Grandfather wants me to stay at home and work and give him all the money.

Nathan's immediate reaction was more in line with a student whose parents and relatives have attended college:

My family and friends are more involved in my education than I ever imagined they would be. From even my friends who are at other colleges call me up to see how I did on my exam that they had heard about or my family every single time I see them, 'how are you doing in school, how are your grades?' being cause they're so concerned and they know what I'm capable of doing so they want me to not fall short of my standards of their standards for me because I just think that's really helpful for them to be there for them to keep pushing me that way if for some reason something went wrong with me psychologically and I wanted to fall out of line I don't feel like I could because they're

there to back me up and I feel like I'm not just letting myself down I'm letting them down as well. They're pushing me

Nathan further explained that his parents had always encouraged him to go to college:

But I've known my whole life, my parents are pretty much, I've talked to my parents my whole life. They always said just go to school and get you a good college education and make you some money one day, be successful. So that's always been my goal and their goal for me.

Nathan's lengthy explanation of why his family and friends are involved in his education underscores the intense optimism and confidence that Nathan brought to the interview. Nathan came across as being extremely earnest in his desire to cooperate and share information about his life as a first-generation student from Southern Appalachia.

Like Nathan, Laura grew up knowing she would go to college, and her answer was amusing as she described her father's reasons for sending her to college:

College for me was a given. I was not one of those kids with the option of going to college after high school. My Dad made sure to tell me every week or so just how hard he worked so I wouldn't have to waste away doing physical labor. My older brother had the choice of more schooling or working with my father, but for us girls it was only the institutes of higher learning. I can't recall ever having a discussion with my family that involved another option. It was just the illusive "college" and whatever that entailed.

High school was merely the first hoop I had to jump through to get to academia.

Laura actually used "air quotes" when she mentioned college in her remarks. The fact that she added "illusive" to the term further highlighted the fact that college was both a given and a

mystery to Laura and her father, but it was a mystery that Laura's father was certain she could unravel.

Bob disclosed the fact that he is an only child during the interview, which, for him, has had an impact on his choices for higher education. Initially Bob wanted to move away to Memphis for college but decided it was best to stay close to home:

My family absolutely wanted me to come to college, because they were high school graduates only and they wanted me to do better. I'm an only child, so they really wanted me to have a better life than they had and a better education was the best route to do that. Bob described his parents as hard working and successful. For them college would be a way to help ensure Bob's success without so much of the hard work they put into their lives.

Speaking of his friends Bob said: "They were supportive as well, and I was supportive of them. I'd say that of about 120 graduates, I can think of maybe 20 or so that went on to college." Bob keeps in touch with a few of his high school friends and has had classes with them at ETSU. For Bob ETSU provides an education but it doesn't remove him from his home culture to any great degree. Bob also commented on the fact that his parents are very traditional and conservative, so he has to edit some of his stories about college when he talks to them. Overall, however, Bob didn't express any great frustration at having to live with his parents while in college.

Sherry, who began her college career in a community college, commented that her parents were also highly supportive of her choice to attend ETSU. She described her parents' insistence:

I just knew I had to go. That was all there was to it. I had to go. They didn't care what I wanted to be. I just had to go and get a degree. Whether it was associates or I kept on going. I had to get some type of college.

Sherry also described how her parents have pushed her younger sister in the same direction: "They've even started my younger sister in the dual enrollment classes. She's in high school. She's doing the Walter State thing right now. To get a step up."

Audrey described encouragement and help from both her mother and her grandparents in her choice to attend ETSU: "My mom pushed me to go to school because she didn't have that opportunity...and she had to work for everything she had and maybe had to lean on other people more than she wanted to." With regard to her the financial assistance she has received from her grandparents, Audrey said, "...if hadn't been for them I probably wouldn't be here."

Maggie's home situation was similar to Audrey's experiences in that she had positive influences regarding her decision to enroll in college, even though finances were tight:

Well, it was really no surprise from my friends, because I've always been in school with them and they know how I am. They know that I'm fairly academic and that college would be right for me. Um, my family, ever since I was five years old, my mom has encouraged me to do the very best I can in academic studies, so, while she didn't get past the 9th grade. She stayed at home with me, and she helped me read and study, so I was very prepared [for] kindergarten. Ever since she went to school with me when I was five, I always wanted to be a teacher. They've always encouraged me.

Jonathan's response was quick. He said that his parents told him to "have a good time and call" if he needed anything.



Of the various responses to question 2, I noted that all of the students described positive support from at least one parent or other relative even if that support was simply to “have fun.” Even Rachel, who was considering a move back to her home community in southwest Virginia, commented on how her grandmother supported her. It is worth noting here that all of the students felt a strong responsibility to honor their parents’ support by doing the best they can in their coursework.

Question 3: *Have your experiences in college changed the way you think about yourself? Do you think that other people might perceive a change in you now that you are a college student?*

As stated earlier, the issue of transformation was the trickiest issue in the interviews. Some students resisted the changes they felt around them, while others embraced the changes. Rachel’s experience with transformation was not a happy change. She commented at length about her disaffection with ETSU and the Tri-Cities area. Early in the interview, Rachel mentioned that she would probably leave ETSU and return to Southwest Virginia to continue her studies:

I probably should’ve went [sic] to the college near home because my grandparents are getting old and things like that. I probably should’ve went [sic] to the UVA-Wise and that’s probably where I’m going to transfer next year.

As the interview continued, Rachel shared more of her frustration with what she felt were the negative attributes of East Tennessee.

Everybody back home knows everybody. If they see somebody out they say “hello, how are you, how ya doing.” Here if you try to talk to somebody they just keep their head down and keep going. That was the big change for me. I thought “well what’s wrong with

me; do I have something on my forehead? Do I have a booger hanging out?" I didn't know what was going on. I've never been treated like that.... I even have a great aunt that's from east Tennessee and she acts the same way so it might be a Tennessee thing. I don't know. Maybe I'm kinda country and everybody here is kinda city. Not like major city but different.

Later in the interview I asked Rachel about issues related to diversity and campus culture. Her responses were surprisingly honest even though she tried to downplay what she perceived as the possibility of racism in her answers.

*What about the people you meet here?* Uh, diverse. They're more diverse here than back home. Back home everybody's white. There's no mix. There's no like different culture and here it's like everywhere.

*Is that a good thing or a bad thing?* I don't know if you want me to answer that cause it'll be kinda different because my roommate was black. I don't know I think, no I better not say that. I mean I don't think.... There's nice people everywhere cause no matter what color your skin is there's some real raunchy people but that's everywhere not just here. It was kinda weird though cause I was studying like the girls that lived next door in my old dorm they were black, my roommate was black, I had never been around black people I didn't know how to act. So that was kinda a culture shock you know. Cause where I come from we had one half black kid who was the quarterback and that was it.

Rachel's strong cultural heritage played into her final comment on the issue of diversity. When I asked her if she had learned anything from the black people she met on campus, she had this to say:

Yeah I learned that I'm a pretty good person believe it or not. I learned that. I saw some of the ways they acted and things like that and it just kinda dawned on me "why do people act like that?" Their behavior and things like that. Kinda like back home if you had done that type of stuff you'd get whooped.

Janet provided a view of transformation that was almost diametrically opposed to that of Rachel. For Janet ETSU and the Johnson City area provided her with ample opportunities to welcome transformation into her life. When I asked her about the diversity she experienced at ETSU, she replied:

I was in cultural shock when I came here cause the first day I saw, you know, like the Asian people and, you know, people from Africa, and I was just so excited. I was like "this is the most beautiful thing." I almost cried I was so excited.

According to Holmes (1986) phrases like "you know" and "like" are used as "hedging devices" (1) when one is unsure about a particular line of reasoning or rhetoric. Linguistically, Janet's use of "you know" and "like" indicates that she is parsing her rhetoric carefully and is trying not to say anything that might be considered racially insensitive. In similar fashion, Rachel reaches in her responses for the right words to describe her reaction to having an African American roommate. She is aware of the racial undertones of her reaction, but she is honest enough to share her actual feelings.

In describing her hometown in southeast Tennessee Janet was less optimistic or, for that matter, careful:

...where I'm from that's hard core mountain folk, Appalachian people. And there's only white people, only white. Um, Southern Baptist is the most dominant religion. There's a very few amount of, um, African- Americans, Hardly any Hispanic people at all. And

they're very closed-minded people, the people where I'm from. They're not open to, um, any other religion, any other race, any other sexual orientation, they're just not open. It's just out of the question.

Of all the interviews for this project, Rachel and Janet provided the most traditional descriptions of southern Appalachian culture when talking about their home cultures. Both of these young women came from extremely rural, small towns in mountainous areas and each had a very different view of her home culture. Janet wished to leave her home culture behind while Rachel decided to return to her home culture.

Maggie had to think about her answer: "...that first day...was very painful for me. My friends weren't here, and I hardly talked to any one. And now, I am still fairly shy, but I am much more open to new experiences and new people." Maggie's experiences were subtle. For her transformation came through her ability to interact with new people. Indeed, Maggie's transformation was tied to her transition from high school friendships to college friendships. In that transition, she acknowledged the personal growth she was making.

Laura took time to consider the transformational aspects of higher education before responding to my question. She emailed me with her answer:

College was a life altering experience on so many levels it could take days to write about it. I remember going to orientation the summer after my senior year and I could sense the freedom I was soon to have. The second I arrived that fall, I reveled in that freedom on all levels. Academically, I asked all the questions I was hesitant to ask in my conservative high school. Socially, I was free to discover the real me not associated with family ties and thirteen years of school history. Spiritually, I was free to challenge my faith and find

my own reasons for the meaning of life. It was a grand, eye-opening time and I was giddy.

In the response Laura describes the classic aspects of transformation that characterize college life for many students. She awakens to the freedom that college life offers students, especially if they have made the decision to live away from home. She seeks to know and understand herself as an individual, separate from her family and heritage. Finally, she opens herself to challenges of her belief system that will help her grow as a critical thinker. The “giddy” idealism with which Laura described her “grand, eye-opening time” remained with me long after the reviews were finished.

Nathan took a much more pragmatic view of transformation. When I asked him about changes he had experienced in his first year of study, he responded that he felt he was becoming more responsible.

It's really made me more responsible being able to understand my priorities and get them straight and also off campus cause you devote so much time away from your family and in groups doing activities so you need more money so you learn that hey, maybe I need to get another job.

Nathan was much more realistic about transformation than most of the other students.

Bob came at this question from an indirect route by talking about his love of film and the political leanings of the people in his life:

For years I hated Michael Moore (the director), but I didn't know why. I was ultra conservative because of other people in school and teachers. My parents weren't that political, but they watch Fox News too much.

In an email following the interview, Bob jokingly referred to his “coming out” as a more liberal thinker while in college. He remains relatively conservative around his parents, but he is quite

liberal while at school. Even though he still lives with his parents and respects them for what they have done for him, Bob realizes that college has changed him for what he considers the better.

I think it's going to make me more open, even more than I am now, to certain ideas, you know, beyond the realm of religion or whatever, just, you know, be open minded, you know, to every teacher and everybody's point of view. I think you have to respect everyone's point of view and not many people do that.

Even though question 3 was the most difficult question for students to grapple with, it also provided some of the most useful and provocative information for this study. For these students transformation seems to be an amorphous experience that they realize only after going through it. Tinto (1993) suggested that students go through stages of transformation during their first year of college that include separation from home culture, a reframing of one's internal perceptions about higher education, and an adjustment of one's external perception of self. The students in this study have experienced these stages to some degree, particularly with regard to reframing their internal perceptions about the effect of higher education on who they are as students and as young adults. Few of the students, however, seemed willing to acknowledge a separation from home culture. Laura and Janet both expressed strong desires to break from their home cultures (for different reasons); however, both women also expressed their ties to specific family members.

Most of the students chose ETSU precisely because it would not entail much of a separation from home culture. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) argued that a strong relationship with parents could make the first year of college less traumatic. Even though these students' parents

did not have specific knowledge of the culture of higher education, their emotional support does help their children to move through the first year of study with an added sense of security.

*Question 4: Imagine that I am a high school senior. I plan to attend college in the fall and will be a first-generation student. What advise would you give me about my freshman year?*

Question 4 was added late in the process of preparing the interview material. As the researcher, I wanted to give students an opportunity to offer advice to incoming first-generation students. This question allowed the students to consider how they might encourage new students in their studies and keep them engaged in the process of learning and growing that characterize higher education. In answer to the question, Maggie talked about the importance of finding someone who can act as a mentor prior to applying for college:

If there's someone there to help you along the way, that would be good. Someone who can talk to you about what it's like to be in college. That would be good. It's a big decision, and it's a big change in your life. You need to be prepared for it.

She also talked about the classroom experience, itself:

...information isn't gonna be spoon fed to you like in high school. There won't be notes available to you if you miss a class. That kind of thing. Professors aren't as scary as you might think. They seem to be generous with their time and such. You have to be willing to go up to them first, though. They don't follow you around telling you when papers are due like in high school.... Again, it's about personal responsibility, I think. High school teachers do everything for you. College professors expect you to participate in the learning process, not just sit there like a bump on a log.

For Maggie the college experience is much better than being in high school; however, college demands a higher level of maturity that some students might find challenging. The key element

in Maggie's response seems to be "personal responsibility," a theme that runs through many of the interviews. Audrey's response to question 4 mirrors Maggie's response to some degree:

I think you should expect it to be challenging. You should go into it with the knowledge that going to college will be an emotional and difficult change, especially if you aren't going to stay at home and commute. You're going to have to be open to meeting new people and if you're going to be staying on campus, be open to meeting a new roommate and how they may be different from you and how you kinda have to accept that.

Both Maggie and Audrey refer to the challenges that define college life. For Audrey, however, the focus is more on the transformational aspects of college, especially in the process of moving away from home and meeting new people. When I asked her about living on campus, she said:

I just know that I've learned and got to know so many different people that I might not associate with if I stayed in an apartment. But with staying in a dorm, the girls on my hall, we've all become really tight. I know them really well, and I feel like I learn better skills to get to know people and just to communicate with people that may be completely different from who you are.

For Sherry the process of making the decision to go to college includes community college and, specifically, dual enrollment courses that allow high school students to take a few lower-division college courses while still in high school. She suggests that community college allows students to transition from high school to college in a less challenging process. She also offered practical information about doing well in college courses:

I would tell you definitely to sit near the front of class and try to make yourself known to [professors] because, especially if you come to ETSU, you kinda blend in with everybody. So, make yourself known to them. Maybe stop by their office and say hey,



my name is such and such. Just wanted to let you know. I would definitely tell them to get to know their professor.

Like Maggie, Bob focused on classroom issues:

College is a lot more fast paced. More responsibility on you. You have to put in more effort. In high school you can easily get by, but in college you have to assert yourself.

You have to study a lot more. I remember my first test. I didn't study, and I got a 75. But it was psychology, so... It's about, you know, if you get a chance to go to college, it's worth it, you know. I mean every job nowadays is requiring college degrees, especially now in this time, jobs are so scarce.

The “chance” Bob refers to is in line with the “opportunity” that other students mentioned when talking about being in college. Again, there is the connotation of uncertainty with regard to college that defines the experience. For Bob and the other students college is a reality; however, for many potential first-generation students, college remains little more than a wasted opportunity or a dream deferred.

Nathan stressed the importance of college as both a stepping-stone to a good career and as a place where students can “find themselves” through social and cultural activities. Regarding classroom work, Nathan was even more specific with his recommendations:

Get yourself mentally prepared because once the semester starts you really have to devote at least everyday a pretty decent amount of time two, three hours if you want to be able and be successful in college, make A's, B's. Be prepared to devote a couple of hours a day to studying, working and just go to class every single day. If you miss class, so many people say school is so easy or school's hard, school's so hard to make an A in, school's hard to make a B in but most of those people are people who haven't been attending

class. And that's one thing that really annoys me. Have the right attitude going into college as in being prepared.

When Janet talked about question 4, she took a different route and focused on what ETSU could do to better serve students in rural areas of Tennessee and beyond.

If it were me I'd go get my Google map and I would pick the most random places I've never heard of and those would be the places I would go for sure. Cause chances are the kids in those big cities already know about all the colleges.

In many ways Janet was the student who was most ready to separate from her home culture and move away to college. As she described her life prior to ETSU she referred to religion as a tool of repression, along with sexism and general poverty. These were the defining elements of her hometown, at least from Janet's perspective. For her the idea of what perspective students need to know is less important than whether schools like ETSU actually reach out to such students in the first place. In her response she used the specific term, "outreach," to describe what ETSU should do to find students such as herself. Unlike most students in this study, Janet was absolutely certain of the power of higher education to transform students in terms of their abilities and their world-views. She talked about how excited she is to be studying at ETSU, and she referred to the transformative aspects of higher education as a positive process that should be embraced by all students.

Most of the other students responded to the fourth question in similar fashion. Theresa referred to the increased employment options that people with college degrees have as a selling point for prospective students. Patrick mentioned the relatively low cost of higher education at ETSU, but he also focused on reasons why students should try to live on campus during their first year of study.

...moving away from your parents it helps you grow up a little bit, helps you mature a little bit, and I guess the main thing is that when you're living at home with your parents it's not going to teach you to be as independent. When you're in college you have to study by yourself.

Rachel's advice centered on her own experiences at ETSU, which were not overly positive. She said that the best aspect of attending school at ETSU was that she got to live on her own for a while and look after herself. Her basic advice was quite simple: "There'll be good times and there'll be bad times."

### Defining Appalachia

*"Appalachian? That's a mountain range. I live in Appalachia, but I'm not Appalachian."*

The student whose thoughts about "Appalachian" and "Appalachia" begin this section voiced what many of the interviewees alluded to as they described the region they call home. During the interviews students talked at length about their Appalachian heritage, which grew to be a pervasive element in each of the three main themes, yet, interestingly, several of the students also questioned the idea of being Appalachian. Students offered both positive and negative views of Appalachian culture and heritage, including fascinating glimpses into Appalachian cuisine. On the whole, however, students tended to focus on disparaging stereotypes of Appalachia.

The reactions to the idea of being Appalachian ranged from serious to humorous. As a result the theme that arises from the research has to do with the definition of Appalachia as it is understood by the students who were interviewed for this project. Students from Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, and Western North Carolina commented at length on Appalachian culture. They used terms such as "red neck," "hillbilly," and "mountain people" to describe their

backgrounds. They also understood the idea of being Appalachian as part of their identity, even if they did not use the term to describe themselves. Interestingly, just one of the students from northeast Tennessee mentioned Appalachian culture as an integral part of her personal or family identity.

I suppose I also identify myself as Appalachian because I am so proud to be a 21st century Appalachian woman. I am not the stereotype as much as I claim some concepts related to the stereotypical definition. I am not raw-boned and do not have either five kids or a no-good husband. I have never handled a snake for a religious purpose and I do not go barefoot unless I am walking around the pool. I am not either blessed with unparalleled knowledge of wildlife or common sense or am I ignorant of “book knowledge.”

Most students were ambivalent about their Appalachian heritage: “There are many stereotypes toward people from this region. Many times I can see that people from other regions consider people from Appalachia to be ignorant or incapable. They are quick to judge a geographical region without considering the facts.” Another student commented on her Appalachian dialect: “People believe just because I have an accent that I'm not able to be intellectual or have any sort of sophistication. There are several stereotypes I'm aware of, peoples' first thought of Appalachia is a bunch of hillbillies living in a trailer park with mullets.” Other students took a more serious tone:

Being a first-generation college student from Appalachia means responsibility to me. I am not sure if everyone feels this way or not, but I feel a strong need to give back some of my education to others. It's more than just being a hillbilly or drinking moonshine all day. It's not about being poor and taking handouts from the government.

Almost all the students mentioned elements of obligation or responsibility that accompanies their Appalachian background. Janet used self-deprecating humor to discuss her Appalachian heritage:

Nobody wants to come visit us, cause they're afraid we're gonna eat them or something. Some of the people are a little scary. I'm not gonna lie, there are some scary people, and a lot of them are in my family. But yeah, I've had a lot of people judge me, make assumptions about me because of where I live. I have a really thick accent, and just from knowing where I'm from and how poor, they make judgments about me that I'm going to be raciest, that I'm going to be conservative and all this.

Not every student shunned Appalachian culture or felt embarrassed by his or her heritage. Laura spoke lovingly of her family and heritage:

My maternal papaw was a lifetime coal miner and worked in the mines in Haysi, Virginia until he was permanently injured when a shaft fell in. He died of black lung when I was fourteen years old. My fondest memory of Haysi was showing him the fossils we (my cousins and I) dug out of the coal veins in the back yard of his house on Big A Mountain. My mother still has his dinner pail. He carried it in the mines each day for years when she was a child. Coal dust, and being Appalachian, is so ingrained in me it is a part of my DNA.

Laura embraced her Appalachian heritage and found it to be a distinct cultural privilege she sought to enhance in her studies at ETSU.

With each student I raised the issue of being Appalachian and about being from Southern Appalachia in particular. The different attitudes were striking. Students from East Tennessee did not consider their Appalachian status when defining themselves. Instead, they used descriptive terms such as "Southern" or "American" rather than "Appalachian." One student said that she

"rarely think[s] about being Appalachian. There's very little in Johnson City to remind me that I am a hillbilly." Interestingly, the student is still aware of the stereotypes associated with Appalachia even though she consciously denies ever thinking about being Appalachian.

On the other hand, Rachel, who is from Southwest Virginia, did acknowledge her Appalachian status. In some cases students also acknowledged their embarrassment about how the descriptor, "Southern Appalachian," is perceived by people from outside the region. One student lamented: "I hate the stereotype of being 'poor, white trash' that gets portrayed on television and in the movies. Not everyone in Appalachia is poor, white, or trashy. I hate it." Rachel admitted that she oftentimes hides the fact that she is from Appalachia.

I tell people I am from the South, but I don't mention "Appalachia" to them. I just say that I am from Virginia. There's no need to add the "Southwest" part. The sad part is that I have to do that in Virginia. There's a certain amount of prejudice against people who live in the Southwestern part of the state. It's like we aren't good enough to be part of "real" Virginia.

From the interviews it would appear that the effect of a relatively urban environment, such as that found in the Tri-Cities and Asheville, reduces the effect of traditional Appalachian culture as an integral aspect of students' personal and family identification process. Students commented that they did not think about Appalachia, nor did they study Appalachia or Appalachian culture while in high school. One student suggested that "Appalachia ends at Virginia. It doesn't really extend here [East Tennessee]. We didn't study Appalachia in high school. It's sort of embarrassing to think about really." Audrey, who is from Western North Carolina, commented that "folksy" versions of Appalachian life are common around Asheville, but "it's more of an artsy thing. People like to see the barefoot mountain mama or the mountain

man as if they existed a hundred years ago and are living fossils now.” Nathan, a Johnson City native, commented that the idea of Appalachia includes a negative connotation that he did not wish to include in his description of himself and his family.

I saw a show on television about this man who travels around the world eating exotic food. He came to Appalachia, and he didn’t even pronounce it right. He pronounced it with a long A in the middle, which is wrong. And he ate things like possum and squirrel and raccoon and even some bear. I’ve never eaten any of those things, but he said that all of those foods are part of the Appalachian diet, like we still live like people did a hundred years ago. I must not be Appalachian, because possum and bear and squirrel...are not part of my diet. He said that people in Tennessee have jobs like whittling and storytelling.

Who was he talking to? Because he sure didn’t talk to anyone I know.

The frustration that Nathan felt over the mispronunciation of “Appalachia” and the skewed view of food and jobs was palpable in the interview. He was very upset that people from Appalachia were being portrayed as living a life that doesn’t exist in his view of East Tennessee. Even though Nathan vigorously defended Appalachia against an “outsider,” he still did not like the idea of referring to himself as “Appalachian.” He preferred “Southern” or “Tennessean.”

All of the students from East Tennessee exhibited elements associated with Appalachian traditional culture, especially with regard to the importance of family; however, all but one of these students reported that they did not “feel” as if they were from Appalachia. On the other hand, most of the students from rural areas associated their identities with being Appalachian to some degree.

Gammell (2006) has suggested that Appalachian culture and heritage greatly influence college students. The students in this study certainly have been influenced by their Appalachian

heritage, but many of them do not associate their lives with Appalachia. They do not consciously incorporate Appalachian mannerisms or traditional behavior into their everyday lives, nor do they eagerly volunteer their cultural status as that of being Appalachian. There are a few possible reasons students in this study tend to deny or ignore their native culture. First, many of the mannerisms that might be associated with Southern Appalachia are so ingrained in the home cultures of the students that they are not aware of them. Second, the students in this study mentioned the effect of Internet and computer technology on their lives, which might be a mitigating factor with regard to cultural heritage. Indeed, these students reflect a contemporary society that is more culturally homogenous and technologically interconnected than ever before. For instance Audrey reported that she stays in touch with friends and family via email, text messaging, and FaceBook: "I feel like they are always near me." As first-generation students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they also know more about college from popular culture sources than past generations of students. Participants mentioned television and film sources of information, even while conceding that many of the sources were stereotypical or incorrect in their representation of college life.

For the most part students' conscious knowledge of Appalachian culture and heritage was limited to food and family. A few of the students in the study acknowledged soup beans and cornbread as a supposed staple of traditional Appalachian cuisine. Only one of the students in the study reported not liking soup beans. Most of the students enjoyed cornbread and considered it an important part of their Appalachian culinary heritage. In fact, a few of the students were quite adamant about the correct way to prepare cornbread. "I can't stand what I call 'yankee cornbread' with sugar in it. I've had cornbread outside of the *South* and it tasted like crumbly



yellow cake.” The student used “South” rather than “Appalachia” even though he was defending Appalachian culture.

Almost all of the students who talked about food heritage agreed that food like soup beans and cornbread are integral parts of Appalachian heritage and culture. Maggie offered her own recipe gleaned from her grandmother and mother.

It’s simple, but you have to do it right or the cornbread won’t have a good crust. You turn the oven on high, about 450 degrees. You pour some oil into a cast iron skillet and put it into the oven to heat up while you make the cornbread batter. My mom taught me to use nothing but cornmeal, an egg, and buttermilk for the best cornbread, and that’s what I use when I make it. I just mix it up till it’s like pancake batter. When the skillet is real hot, I pour in the batter and bake it till it’s brown and crunchy. ...That’s the way to make cornbread like the old days.

The participants who described cooking as part of their heritage commented on how recipes had been handed down from one generation to another. Grandparents pass recipes and cooking techniques along to children who then pass those same recipes and techniques down to their children.

One of the most interesting descriptions came from Jonathan, whose childhood memories included parents and other relatives gathering each year to make apple butter.

My grandma and aunts would come over early in the morning while my grandfather and dad hung the big copper pot outside in the backyard over a big fire. It was October and I had to go to school, but I kept thinking about the apple butter all day. By the time I got home, my mom and my grandma were stirring the apple butter, and it smelled so good. My grandma brought a little bottle of cinnamon oil, and she would add drops to the apple

butter from time to time. My mom likes to add those little “red-hot” cinnamon candies that turn the apple butter red and make it hot. Dad kept adding wood to the fire, and my aunts were in the kitchen getting what looked like a hundred jars ready. The smell of the fire and the cinnamon will be with me forever. And the taste of that apple butter over biscuits and butter on a cold winter morning. That’s what I call good eating.

Most of the students in this study had specific stories of food they associated with Appalachian culture, but not all. One student commented: “We don’t eat that kind of food. I like real food, like hamburgers and pizza. I don’t go in for that country food stuff, except I do love fried chicken.”

When asked about other elements of Appalachian culture, most of the students drew a blank. A few of the students commented on country and bluegrass music. One student did not care for country music, while another student said that he did enjoy country music and is, in fact, considering a class in the music department devoted to country and bluegrass music. “I feel like it’s [country and bluegrass music] part of my roots, my culture, and I like the way it sounds. I want to learn more about it.” For most of the students there is a distinction between country music as recorded by musicians in Nashville and the bluegrass or “hillbilly” music that derives from Southern Appalachian culture. One student described it quite clearly: “I hate hillbilly music, but I love country music singers like Garth Brooks, Keith Urban, or Patty Loveless.” Another student said that she had always liked Dolly Parton but that “Dolly doesn’t drag down all that bluegrass music.” Interestingly, both Loveless and Parton depend upon Appalachian themes extensively in their music, but the students interviewed for this project did not consider either singer to be overtly Appalachian. Again, the distinction seems to be between what is perceived as Southern as opposed to Appalachian.

When asked about how aspects of their Appalachian heritage such as food and music played into their perceptions of higher education, most of the students in the study admitted varying levels of embarrassment. “I figured college wasn’t the place to talk about soup beans. It wasn’t what I wanted to learn about.” Audrey shared her surprise:

I didn’t think talking about things like soup beans and cornbread or moonshine was appropriate. I figured my professors would look down on me. I couldn’t hardly believe it when one of my professors talked about drinking moonshine, and a couple of my professors have mentioned cornbread in class. At first, it was sort of strange, like they were making fun, but they were serious. After that, I didn’t feel so weird about mentioning those things. I felt like they respected my background, and that made me feel more comfortable in class.”

#### The Technology Divide

One of the more intriguing secondary themes was that of technology. On the surface, the students in this study represent just about any other college student in the nation. They are part of a "connected" society in which cell phones and YouTube are the norm. Each of the students in this study owns a cell phone, and 9 of the 11 students own at least one computer. In his interview Nathan commented on something he heard when he participated in orientation. Professors who addressed the new students mentioned that they would be using technology more in college than they ever had before. When I asked Nathan what he would say to high school students thinking about college, his first response was to encourage them to purchase a computer. Other students interviewed for this study commented on technology as it impacted their studies at ETSU. Theresa had a slightly different take on the issue. She reported that she didn’t feel comfortable with computer technology, but she used it because of its importance in college work. She

commented that her family now considers her a computer whiz, even though she doesn't consider herself very adept at technology. Audrey described how she keeps in touch with friends via computer technology, but she admitted that her family did not know very much about technology.

...they mail me things through the mail, and I send them cards and things like that, so we communicate through that. My grandparents aren't...they don't use technology like that. My mom doesn't even know how to turn on a computer. [laughter] She doesn't! I mean, we have a computer, but she doesn't know how to use it. So, that doesn't help with the email.

In follow-up questions via email some of the students described using computers primarily for social or entertainment value prior to enrolling at ETSU. At the same time a few of the students reported having trouble learning to view their technology as academic tools. While the information gleaned from this study concerning computer use in higher education is scant, it does suggest that future research in the area might be useful. Laura wrote in Facebook that she is connected to both her family and the Internet. She described using email, text messages, Twitter, and social network programs to keep in touch with friends and family. For her the big surprise was in learning to use that same technology for research papers: "...I had no idea how I could use a computer and the Internet to access research sources when I was in Freshman Composition courses. I learned none of that in high school."

While Patrick was familiar with computer technology generally, he had a similar experience to Laura when it came to academic technology:

My high school didn't have many computers that actually worked. I had a computer at home, but I gamed. I didn't do school stuff, except for a few book reports. I didn't expect

for college to be so technology oriented. I didn't check my email for the first five weeks of my first semester, and I missed a lot of important stuff.

Other students complained that professors assumed they knew how to use word processing programs and online delivery systems. Jonathan shared some of his frustration:

I took the CSCI course, but it didn't really help much. I still didn't know how to log in to D2L. I didn't even know what it was till one of my teachers told us we had to use it for the syllabus and for turning in papers.

The theory of the "Digital Natives" as espoused by Prensky (2001) does not seem to hold for these students. These first-generation students from Southern Appalachia have not grown up "swaddled" in a cocoon of technology, and those who did have access to technology did not use it widely as an academic tool. Audrey mentioned her problems with Google:

I didn't know what Google was when I started here. I had seen the commercials about Google and the ads everywhere, but I never bothered to look at it. The very first day of classes at ETSU, my English teacher told us to use Google to find out about a topic we were discussing. I was lost.

Maggie commented on her high school experience: "We had a few computers, but there were only about a dozen for a very large school. In my senior year my drama teacher had a computer in her classroom, but it didn't work." Other students shared stories of frustration when they were asked to do certain things on the computer that were foreign to them. Janet's story is indicative of how many first-generation students deal with situations in college they don't understand.

My professor said we could use the library online. I didn't understand what he meant. I didn't ask either. I just went to the library and watched the people using computers, but I

didn't know what they were doing. I felt dumb, but I learned it on my own. I didn't have to ask for help.

For these students the technology requirements for class work at ETSU were an additional burden layered on top of an already intimidating experience. Being able to solve the mystery of technology, however, became a morale booster for Patrick: "When I figured out how to use the library online, I felt that I could do anything at school." For Patrick learning to use technology in an academic atmosphere was a breakthrough moment. He no longer felt as if he were "on the outside looking in."

### Summary

Chapter 4 includes information about the data collected for this study including participant biographies, notes on the interview questions, and two secondary themes that arose from the interviews: Appalachian life and academic technology.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

A colleague who was a first-generation student herself commented that being a first-generation student from Southern Appalachia is like walking a tight rope between two realities. On one side there is family made up of parents, siblings, grandparents, and the like who might not see the worth of a college degree. On the other side is college culture, itself, that aspect of a university education that challenges students to think critically about their beliefs, assumptions, biases, and prejudices. On one side of the rope there is a distinct conservative pull back to home culture. On the other side there is a progressive push forward toward enlightenment. For the first-generation student trying to walk that tight rope university life can be challenging.

One of the early things I learned about the first-generation students I interviewed for this project is that they appear to be very much like traditional students (i.e. second and third generation students) in many ways. Most of them experience college in ways that are similar to college students throughout American higher education. Their concerns about classes, professors, financial aid, grades, and career choices are concurrent with a majority of American college students regardless of background. What differentiates these students, however, is the fact that they must "learn the language" of higher education while also taking their initial courses.

Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, and Alisat (2000) observed that students who have complex expectations regarding higher education tend to do better in the first year of study than students who have simple expectations and who fall prey to the "freshman myth" espoused by Stern (1966). They defined "complex expectations" as including information about the culture of college and specific interests in an area of study. According to the study higher expectations

should also be tempered by the recognition of challenges and hurdles associated with college.

The students in this study did not fall in either extreme. They expressed more guarded expectations about college. These expectations did not include specific information about the culture of higher education but, instead, were based on perceived needs that a college degree could fulfill, such as career goals. Only one of the students in this study expressed extreme optimism about college, which studies (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986; Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000; Rice, 1992) suggest can lead to depression and high levels of stress when expectations do not comply with the realities of college life. Instead, most of these first-generation students bring with them a high level of pragmatism and a healthy, native skepticism about college life. Part of this attitude stems from the fact that ETSU is primarily a commuter school. Also, first-generation students do not carry with them unnecessary baggage associated with stories about college life. In one sense stories about college life that are part of second, third, and fourth generation students' backgrounds can make life easier in the first year of college. Such stories can also encourage the "freshman myth" syndrome in which students come to college with extremely high levels of idealism about the experience only to feel violated later when those expectations are not met or are challenged by the reality of college life.

My theory, grounded in the interviews, rests upon the initial theory expressed to me by Sally Lee, Assistant VP for cultural affairs at ETSU (Interview, May 2009). Lee suggests that there are two distinct groups of first-generation students at ETSU, those whose parents have encouraged them to go to college and those whose parents have remained neutral or critical of their child attempting a college degree. From the results of my research I would offer the tentative theory that students whose parents encourage their children to attempt higher education tend to perform well in their studies even though they still might feel ill at ease in the



environment of higher education. Every student interviewed for this project commented on how at least one of their parents, friends, or guardian relatives had encouraged them to pursue higher education because of the perceived benefits of a college degree.

In the end the one theme that appeared to thread through all of my discussions with the students in this project concerns the way in which these students have been acculturated to view higher education. It is pertinent that there are no philosophy majors in this group of students. These students are definitely pragmatic when it comes to the importance of higher education. They view the process in practical terms. They are here to “get an education”; however, their definition of “getting an education” is probably different from the way their professors would define the process. Every student expressed a strong interest in using his or her college degree to get a good job. The moral worth of a college degree is in its ability to help a graduate get a job, which is a distinctly utilitarian perspective that seems to pervade these students’ views of their time at ETSU. In *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (2004) James Webb describes quite clearly how modern Appalachia represents by its very nature a microcosm of American culture; however, that microcosm isn’t necessarily a positive attribute, especially with regard to education, which has always been viewed by the people of Appalachia with skeptical eyes. Nevertheless, Webb ends his book with the stirring and inspirational message that Appalachians “are the molten core at the very center of the unbridled, raw, rebellious spirit of America” (p. 343). In all of this, however, communication seems to be the key element. Whether we are discussing students who have trouble acclimating to college culture or professors who cannot fathom what it means to be a first-generation student, communication is at the heart of the matter.

First-generation students from Southern Appalachia who are enrolled at ETSU bring with them a particular set of social and cultural values that fuel their perceptions of higher education. Hand and Payne (2008) suggest that the factors affecting first-generation students include family and home culture, financial concerns, “internal locus of control,” relationships and emotional support, and the communication of information (p. 10). Likewise, Cox (2009) focuses on faulty communication patterns between professors and students, in which neither side understands the other.

### Background of the Problem

With few exceptions (Hand & Payne, 2008; Gammell, 2006), qualitative research regarding college students from Southern Appalachia has been almost nonexistent, especially regarding first-generation students from the region. Recent literature about first-generation students (Clauss-Ehlers, 2007; Inkelas et al., 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; & Terenzini et al., 1996) has been almost entirely quantitative in nature. We know first-generation students by the numbers, but we rarely hear their stories. The lack of qualitative research on the topic inhibits further study of the experiences of first-generation Appalachian students. Likewise, students within this demographic do not have a means of relating the impact of higher education on their personal lives.

### Discussion and Conclusions

It is my primary contention that contemporary first-generation students are not as “traditional” (or stereotypical) as we might first assume. Many of my own expectations regarding the students I interviewed for this project were pushed aside as I listened to them talk about their lives as university students. While most of the students did talk about the importance of family and heritage during the interviews, they also talked about academic preparation, career goals, and

technology in ways that I did not expect. It became clear through the interviews that these first-generation students are unique, especially when compared to first-generation students of 10 or 20 years ago. For instance all of the students, even Rachel as she contemplated moving back to Southwest Virginia, use technology to stay connected to family and friends as well as community, local, and world events. They are connected to a broader source of information than those who preceded them in the quest for a college degree before the avalanche of social technology that defines so much of our lives today. When I was an undergraduate, I had none of the computer technology that students routinely use today to communicate with family, friends, and people around the world. I did not have Google or a library presence online that I could access before stepping foot in Sherrod Library. The concept of engaging with the World Wide Web via a home computer or a laptop (or an iPhone) was not present in my view of college life. There were no computer labs on campus. My circle of social interaction was much more local in nature; whereas, the students in this study have the potential to contact people around the world. They can stay in almost constant contact with family via email, Twitter, or through mobile technology that allows them to chat with mom while driving along State of Franklin Road. In essence they do not really leave behind family and friends when they go to college, yet, at the same time, they actively engage in a much more sophisticated social network than I did when I was in college.

From a pop culture perspective, television, film, and computer technology created a homogenized culture in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dahl, 2001) that has continued to flourish into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With regard to first-generation students from Southern Appalachia, I believe we are now seeing manifestations of that homogenization. It is both provocative and frustrating. Students do not have to suffer the same separation anxieties that past students did when they left

their home culture behind to attend college, yet they now view higher education as a commodity, as little more than a hurdle toward the real goal of a career. These first-generation students from Southern Appalachia are also part of a "connected" society in which cell phones and YouTube are the norm. Each of the students in this study owns a cell phone, and 9 of the 11 students own at least one computer. While they might not know many of the specifics of higher education, they do understand the special nature of being in college. While they comment that pursuing a college degree is a "wonderful opportunity," a "marvelous learning experience," and an "incredible journey," they also recognize that they must overcome certain disadvantages that come with being a first-generation student.

### Major Themes

As part of the data analysis process three major themes emerged from the coding process: heritage, transition, and transformation. Each theme carries with it various secondary themes that were part of the coding process. For instance, issues related to heritage include feelings about family and friends left behind, memories of high school and past experiences, and concerns about Appalachian stereotypes. Issues related to transition include expectations and experiences related to higher education generally and ETSU specifically, along with definite opinions regarding coursework, college culture, and career plans. Finally, the theme of transformation provided some of the most emotionally charged information in the interviews and, at the same time, remained the most illusive of the three. Many of the students in the study were relatively new in the transition process to higher education and, thus, could only comment on the challenging aspects of becoming a college student. Other students had already experienced aspects of transformation and were eager to share their stories about the transformative effects of college. All of the students focused on issues of change with regard to their time at ETSU,

especially the changes they experienced in their first few months of college study due to their first-generation status.

Pike and Kuh (2005) suggest that first-generation students are more likely to face difficulties during their first year of college work if they do not feel engaged with the academic and social cultures of higher education. In this study students commented on the fact that they believe they are not as engaged with the culture of ETSU as other students. For instance, Theresa and Maggie both admitted that they avoided talking to their professors even when they had legitimate questions. Theresa said that she lived in fear that a professor would call on her in class even though she always tried to be prepared for class. "I figured I didn't know anything worth sharing in class. I felt like the other students in class knew much more than I did, so I kept to myself and didn't say anything." The thought of speaking to a professor, even in a classroom situation, intimidated her to the point that she remained quiet. Cox (2009) argues that there is a distinct "failure to communicate" between first-generation students and their professors that stems from the fact that few professors are, themselves, first-generation students. Cox writes:

College is expensive, unfamiliar, and intimidating. Inexperienced students expect tough classes and demanding, remote faculty. They may not know what an assignment means, what a score indicates, or that a single grade is not a definitive measure of ability. And they certainly don't feel entitled to be there. They do not presume success, and if they have a problem, they don't expect to receive help or even a second chance. (p. 1)

Most of the students in the study were confident in their academic work at the university; however, almost all of the students projected some of the fears Cox describes. Pike and Kuh argue that the best determiner of success for first-generation students in the classroom seems to be in finding ways to increase their engagement in campus culture and activities, especially

through dorm life. They write: “living on campus puts students in close physical proximity so they cannot avoid being confronted on an almost daily basis by others who look, talk, and hold values different from their own” (p. 289). The implication of the research is that full immersion in the inherent diversity of a college campus seems to be the determining factor in whether a first-generation student will seek engagement with college culture.

During the interviews several of the students commented on the positive effects of dorm life. For instance, Laura, who lived on campus and was very much engaged with the college culture of ETSU when she was a freshman, wrote eloquently about her experiences with diversity on campus in a follow-up email to the initial interview.

There were so many different people and different ideas on campus. The second I arrived that fall, I reveled in the diversity on all levels. Academically, I asked all the questions I was hesitant to ask in my conservative high school. Socially, I was free to discover the real me not associated with family ties and thirteen years of school history. Spiritually, I was free to challenge my faith and find my own reasons for the meaning of life. It was a grand, eye-opening time, and I was giddy.

Jonathan, another dorm student at ETSU, reflected some of the same ideas that Janet shared.

I didn't think I would [living in a dorm], but it's been really good. I've met a bunch of good people and made new friends that I wouldn't make otherwise I guess. It's made me grow up too because I don't have mom there to do my laundry or fix me food or anything. I think living in the dorm is good too because you get to live away from home but in a way that keeps your parents happy. Living on campus is part of the whole college experience, I guess.

Rachel, who has since left ETSU, was more circumspect in her description of college life:

Well, it's going to be a little bit different. You're gonna expect some culture change. People being friendly and unfriendly, mostly unfriendly. But you know you meet a few friends along the way and it kind of evens itself out. It was probably the best thing I ever did, coming to college and getting away from home for awhile. Making myself more self-reliant. There'll be good times and there'll be bad times.

Janet, who also lives on campus, declared enthusiastically:

I was in cultural shock when I came here cause the first day I saw, you know, like the Asian people and, you know, African Americans and people from all over the world, and I was just so excited. I was like this is the most beautiful thing. I almost cried I was so excited.

Nathan, who does not live on campus but plans to do so later, admitted:

...I've met people who live in a dorm that just seem like they just know so many more people and know so many more activities and groups around campus because they're here 24/7. Whereas whenever I get out of class I just go to my house or to work and I'm not as involved with the activities around campus. So I think, I think honestly, probably coming from me who hasn't lived in a dorm yet probably to be involved it'd be better to live in a dorm.

Each of these students understands the positive aspects associated with dorm life. Jonathan's comment that dorm life is part of "the whole college experience" suggests that the students in this study appreciate the traditions of university life even if they do not fully understand them. The use of the phrase also suggests that Jonathan and students like him appreciate the traditional role of college in the lives of students, probably through various media portrayals of higher education. Nevertheless, the data from the study suggest that appreciation for traditional

portrayals of college life do not necessarily translate into the realities of first-generation students who are pursuing a college degree as part of the larger pursuit of a successful, lucrative career.

### Theme 1: Heritage

Heritage plays an important role in the way the students in this study perceive their college experience even though a majority of the students ignored the term, Appalachia, as part of their heritage. For these students heritage is defined primarily through the lens of family and home culture. They shared stories of their parents and grandparents, and they talked about cultural aspects of their lives that they brought with them to ETSU, including food and music, that they describe as uniquely Appalachian. Much of what constitutes the heritage theme is associated with issues and topics that arose from the second main interview question in the study.

Proximity. One of the most important subthemes related to heritage concerns proximity, or the distance students had to travel in order to attend ETSU and the effect such distance had on their views of the school. Most of the students chose ETSU because it was close to family and friends. Several of them commented on the “safety net” or “security” of proximity to home culture that ETSU provides. Nathan was very pleased with the security of having family nearby:

I have so many people that are backing me up, that are pushing me, that are keeping me positive. So I just think I made a good choice in choosing ETSU and staying local. I can be home in less than an hour, so my family is always nearby.

Janet moved to ETSU from the Chattanooga area and relocated her sense of home community to the Tri-Cities because of her negative view of her hometown. In a poignant moment during the interview, she confessed her antipathy toward her home community:

It’s a horrible, it’s a horrible place, I’m, I’m just so happy to be gone from there. And, yeah I love ‘em. I love ‘em just the same. They’re just not very supportive of me, except



for my mom. They want me to come back, and I just can't do that.

She wants to stay in the Tri-Cities area and plans to move her mother to the area as well.

Rachel, who did not consider her time at ETSU to be a positive experience, did mention her affinity for a school closer to her hometown in Southwest Virginia, especially because she feels it is her responsibility to look after her grandparents who live within a few miles of the school.

At first my grandma she didn't really like it. She wanted me to go to college but she didn't like that I was moving away cause we were like best friends. But she's really proud of me and wants me to keep going on. And my grandpa, he was a little hesitant at first he wanted me to get a job somewhere. I probably should've gone to the college near home because my grandparents are getting old and things like that. I probably should've gone to UVA-Wise and that's probably where I'm going to transfer next year.

In fact she has relocated to UVA-Wise to continue her studies and live with her grandparents. In doing so, however, her move further underscores the idea of proximity to home culture that is part of the Southern Appalachian tradition and certainly part of the experience of higher education that defines the lives of these students. All of the students in this study commented on the practicality of attending ETSU or acquiring a college degree generally. For them college represents a means to an end, the end being a job or a career. One student compared college to a job:

I see it as kind of a job, you know. I'm not getting paid well, but in the long run I'm getting paid to do this. I see it as an opportunity for me to succeed. See it as like a job.

This is my job now. Do this so you can get done. Get a good job. Do well and go back to help your family.

On its surface any college student could have made this claim, but the final phrase—“go back to help your family” —suggests one of the defining elements of Southern Appalachian culture, the transactional obligation to return to one’s home culture and support family (Ergood & Kuhre, 1976). Another student echoed this response: “I’m doing this so I can get a good job and take care of my parents one day the way they took care of me when I was a kid.”

First-generation students who grew up near ETSU were both familiar with the school because of proximity and less apprehensive about attending college. For instance, Nathan, who feels very comfortable in his role as a first-generation college student, commented on his close proximity to ETSU: “it’s practically in my backyard.” Even though Maggie grew up close to ETSU, she still reflected upon some doubt:

I knew the campus pretty well from living so close for all these years, but I knew very little about what it meant to be a student here. I thought it was the same as high school, only bigger. No one told me about all the work and what it's like to be a college student. I definitely felt a little left out there.

On the other hand, students who were not familiar with a college or university near their home culture were more likely to report being apprehensive of higher education. Audrey, who is from Western North Carolina, admitted that she was apprehensive about the size of ETSU:

At first I was scared. The campus seemed so huge compared to my little high school. My graduating class had about 30 students, and this campus seemed like a city compared to home. I felt like I didn’t belong here at all for the first week or two. I wanted to give up, but I kept thinking about what I would do back home, so I stuck it out. It’s been hard, but I’m beginning to like it more now.

Pragmatism. As indicated earlier, a secondary theme of pragmatism ran through each of the main themes. With regard to heritage, most of the students interviewed expressed their view of college as a means to getting a job and living a better life than their parents. Nearly all of the students commented on things their parents and grandparents told them about college, especially the idea of a college graduate being able to "do better" than his or her parents in life. Embedded in such phrases is a long-held idealism about the effects of a college education, oftentimes coinciding with the equally long-held suspicion of higher education that many Appalachian families hold (Webb, 2004). Thus, these first-generation, Southern Appalachian students viewed higher education for the most part as a journey towards employment and the opportunity to help their parents and their native culture. They are not necessarily concerned about the intellectual opportunities in higher education. They want the "training" necessary to get a good job that will allow them to pursue whatever version of the American dream they hold dear. Typical of traditional Appalachian family structure and culture, these students recognize the great opportunity they have being in college, but they also think about their families "back home." Many of the students in this study spoke specifically about being able one day to return to their families and their hometowns with skills that will allow them to give something back to the community that nurtured them in the first place.

In *Born Fighting* Webb (2004) argues that the poverty in Southern Appalachia has meant that education did not receive the same kind of funding or, for that matter, interest as it did in other part of the country. He refers to the culture of Southern Appalachia as being traditionally that of "isolation, hard luck, and infinite stubbornness that has always shunned formal education and mistrusted—even hated—any form of aristocracy" (p. 12). Likewise, the students in this study included shades of Webb's argument in their own descriptions of higher education. For

instance, Janet reported that her grandfather was extremely upset with her decision to go to college and has not spoken to her since she moved to Johnson City. He wanted her to “stay at home and work and give him all the money.” Both Rachel and Patrick reported that family members were suspicious of college.

Few of the students in this project were interested in the idea of college culture; although, most of them were familiar with popular culture stereotypes of college life. “I’ve seen the college movies like *Animal House*, *Old School*, and *Legally Blonde*, but they don’t really prepare you for real college. It’s all different when you get here.” The students in this study were more impressed with the “opportunity” or “chance” to go to college as a prerequisite for a rewarding career after graduation. They are not particularly interested in what might be termed the traditional college culture, the campus community of scholarship and cultural opportunities that most professors and college graduates consider an essential and oftentimes transformational aspect of higher education. One of the students argued that “college isn’t all that cultural stuff so much as the career that I’m working toward. That’s why I’m here.” Another student added to that sentiment:

I feel really lucky about getting to go to college and getting to have the experiences because a lot of people, even if they could get scholarships and stuff, they don’t know about them. They just give up. And that’s what I was determined not to do. I feel really privileged that I actually got to come to college and that I’m here. I’m going to make this opportunity work.

Time and time again students used terms like “opportunity” and “chance” to describe their presence as students at ETSU. Both words carry connotations that indicate a lack of assurance in the outcome of a venture and play into the theory of entitlement that Cox (2009) presents. For these students college is not a given so much as an opportunity or chance to break

away from their circumstances and “do better” than their parents. Every student in the study used “opportunity” and words like it to describe their decisions to attend college. While second- and third-generation students might use similar terms, it tends to be particular to first-generation students as they think about their other options upon graduating from high school. Students commented on how important the “opportunity” of attending college is for them. Audrey commented that it was both “overwhelming” and “exciting ...to have the opportunity to go to school”, while, at the same time, pointing out that family members pushed her to succeed in her coursework. These students are well aware that circumstances could have conspired to keep them out of college. They feel as if they have been given a chance to better themselves, and they are serious about making the most of the opportunity.

First-generation students from Southern Appalachia are similar to other groups of first-generation students in that they do not feel fully integrated into college culture, not like the students whose parents and grandparents attended college. They have been given a chance, but if they do not perform satisfactorily, they will not be given a second chance, at least in the stereotypical views of college life that first-generation students carry with them to class each day. Some students described faculty members as being cold or “remote,” while other students described large lecture halls with a hundred or more students in each session. Theresa “felt lost from the first day of class. I had no idea what was going on, and I didn’t talk to anyone else in the class. I dropped it because I couldn’t stand going there after the first week.” Important in Theresa’s commentary is the fact that she did not ask for help or seek advice from other students. Instead, she lost confidence in her ability to function in such a classroom and dropped the course. Finally and most importantly, each of the students commented on what he or she considered to be a desired effect of a college education: the establishment of a career that allows one to “do

better” than his or her parents and, as several of the students described, take care of aging parents. Most of the responses were infused with a deep pragmatism that pushed these students forward in their studies.

### Theme 2: Transition

The second major theme in this study revolves around the preparation and expectations that students bring to college and the perceptions of college they have once they are enrolled and is associated with main interview questions 1 and 4. This theme is, in some ways, also aligned with the students’ feelings about heritage, home, family, and friends as they begin the process of becoming college students. Boatsman (1999) contends that first-generation college students use their experiences in higher education as a mediating buffer between home culture and the social and career goals that have the potential to pull them away from home. All of the students interviewed for this project spoke about their expectations for college and how those ideas changed once they actually enrolled and started taking classes; however, most of the students also admitted that college had begun to change them in different ways. While some of the respondents did participate in college-sponsored social activities meant to introduce them to college culture, such as Preview, most of them were not overly impressed with the events. For instance, Bob found the event boring: “I came to Preview, but that's like the biggest waste of time. The whole point of that is to meet new people, but I'll kinda just talk to anybody.” When I asked him how he might renovate Preview, he responded:

I'd do it more like Orientation and divide people up by their major, because when you meet people with your same interests, it's a lot easier to get along and meet new people. What they do in Preview is put you in random groups. I had Psychology majors with me in my group. You can't really connect that way. Especially with three days. You don't

really get a chance to talk about that much.

Bob's desire to divide groups according to majors underscores the drive these students have to complete coursework and move on toward other goals. They are not overly interested in the cultural possibilities of being a college student. Arguably, one might attribute this lack of interest to the students' first-generation standing. Most of the students in the study did comment on social aspects of their time on campus. A student who has chosen to live in a dorm on campus complained about the lack of campus culture on weekends: "Everybody leaves once Friday comes. There's nobody on campus. So I guess it doesn't have as much of a personal feel. It takes a lot of the social interaction away too." Nevertheless, few of the students in the study actually sought out cultural opportunities on campus. A few of the students noted that ETSU is primarily a commuter campus and is relatively lifeless during evening hours, on the weekends, and during breaks. Interestingly, the students did not bemoan the apparent lack of cultural activities on campus. They were more interested in their grades and the classes they would need to meet graduation requirements. "I looked into some of the cultural stuff on campus, but it didn't interest me much. I'd rather just take my classes, study, then go home and study some more." Another student responded: "Really, I don't care whether there's a movie or a concert I can go to, even though that's nice and all. I'd rather just get through everything and graduate." Finally, a student remarked simply: "I don't have time for cultural activities unless I have to do something for class. I work twenty hours a week and carry 15 hours here." In these instances, the students were pragmatic in their view of college life. They focused on classes and moving toward graduation. They saw little use in cultural activities outside of the work assigned to them in their courses.

From the perspective of one who has been part of the culture of higher education for quite

some time, I find this view frustrating yet reasonable in light of work responsibilities that many students bring with them to their studies in higher education. Moreover, I would suggest that the pragmatism expressed by these students is probably indicative of the changing nature of higher education as we seek to educate a wider, more diverse, and more career-oriented student population.

As noted earlier, nearly all of the students interviewed for this project mentioned the “opportunity” or the “chance” to pursue a college degree. They also mentioned that their parents told them that a college degree would allow them to “do better” in life.

My whole family acts like that. My parents told me that college would help me do better than they did in life. They just think that I’m the smartest person in the world cause I’m going to college. It’s really sweet. So now I’m telling my nephews that they have to do well in school so that can go to college.

These students took a pragmatic approach to a university education that is worth analyzing for its impact on their first-generation status. Many students regardless of generation status will focus on the job potential inherent in the acquisition of a college degree, especially in difficult economic times (Fuller, Manski, & Wise, 1988). First-generation students, however, add a layer of familial obligation to the pragmatism. They feel obliged to “do better” than their parents, yet they also feel a strong pull back to their home communities after graduation to help those they left behind. One student, who came to ETSU from another part of East Tennessee, has grown to love the Tri-Cities area and plans to move her mother and siblings to the area as soon as she graduates and gets a job.

I lived in a single parent home, and mom had always said, “I want you to go to college but it’s your decision but I’d like for you to go. I want better things for you than this life.”



She always drilled it that I needed to go to college, and then I could come back and help her.

This deep sense of obligation to those “left behind” defines the first-generation college experience for each of the students interviewed for this project and represents an important secondary in the constant comparison analysis of the interview data. “The people in my family haven’t even graduated high school so I was really, really proud. And I felt really honored and privileged to be here so that I could eventually help them do better.” Another student added: “I’m doing this so I can give them more and do more for my own family one day.”

Gammell (2006) found that first-year (not necessarily first-generation) students from Southern Appalachia were able to shift friendships from family and friends in their home culture to people they met in the college culture of University of Tennessee (122). While students in this study did mention making friends at ETSU, they did not make as clear a shift from culture of origin to culture of higher education. One possible reason might be found in a fundamental difference between UT and ETSU. East Tennessee State University is a commuter school for many of its enrolled students, including a majority of the students in this study, while UT represents a more traditional university dorm culture. There is also the issue of technology, which allows students to remain in near constant contact with family and friends from their home cultures.

Much of the research on first-generation academic longevity (Christie & Dinham, 1991; DeCuir, 2007; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Tinto, 1993) suggests that a majority of first-generation students drop out of school after one semester. All of the students in this study were in their second, third, or fourth semester and, thus, might be considered above average in terms of their motivation to continue working toward a college degree. All of the students in this study

exhibit what appears to be a natural pragmatism as they consider their transition into higher education. As these students construct their perceptions of higher education, they do so from a studied distance rather than jumping directly into the culture of the university. The transactional relationships with family members that many of these students talk about allows them to remain aloof, so to speak, to the traditions and methods of higher education that define the experience for many non-first-generation students, particularly with regard to the vocabulary and jargon that are part of the college experience. Perhaps doing so allows these students breathing room to consider their experiences and incorporate them into their construction of higher education.

### Theme 3: Transformation

Transformation is a difficult theme to tease out of the interviews, but it is definitely a major influence on the students in this project. The theme of transformation is associated with the third main interview question. Most of the students were aware—sometimes painfully aware—that college was changing them in ways they didn't expect. Audrey commented about how she had stopped communicating with people she knew in high school: "I don't see them anymore. We don't talk, and I don't really think about it that much." Audrey, who keeps in touch with family and friends via technology, also commented on how she still feels a sense of separation from her home culture: "I feel like things are happening there that don't include me anymore. Life goes on." One of the most intense realizations of transformation occurred, however, when Maggie told me about how her "learning curve" had risen sharply during her first year of study. At one point, Maggie pondered her use of the term.

"Look at me. Look at me." She stopped and considered what we had just been discussing. "A year ago, I wouldn't have known what that term meant. Now I'm using it like a college student." Again, she stopped to consider her statement, and this time tears welled up in her eyes.

“I *am* a college student. That’s the part that’s been missing. I took classes and did all my work, but I didn’t feel like a real college student until this very moment. Just using that simple phrase made the difference. I *am* a college student.” At this point, we both had tears in our eyes as she pondered the change that had come over her almost imperceptibly yet profoundly. For the first time in her life, she was a college student. It was no longer a matter of “feeling like being” a college student. She was a college student. In that moment Maggie realized that college had transformed her from the shy, quiet student who enrolled at ETSU a little over a year ago to a vibrant young college student who was able to visualize her dreams and discuss her goals with me in this interview. Her transformation was stunning. I could see it in the way she sat across the table from me during the remainder of the interview. Her posture straightened, and her voice became stronger. She did not avert her eyes from me as we talked. The fact that she was a first-generation student from Southern Appalachia no longer dominated our discussion. She was now a college student, and she pushed to talk about what it means to be working toward a bachelor’s degree.

During the interviews I realized that first-generation students at East Tennessee State University might not necessarily view their status as being substantively different from those students who come from homes in which one or both parents and other family members have attended college. Indeed, most of the students in this project indicated that they are doing well in their classes and feel a certain "kinship" to the university. One student reported that his affection for ETSU has increased steadily to the point that he now refers to the school as his "second home" and is actively encouraging his younger brother and friends to attend ETSU. He commented: "I feel like I can do a good job at ETSU and get a degree that means something." At the same time, first-generation students are likely to report that when they first arrived on

campus as freshmen or transfer students, they felt "alone," "alienated," or "frightened." As Janet described it: "It took me about half of a semester to really get comfortable cause it's so different from school at home. It was a huge cultural change and shock. At first I felt totally alone. None of my friends came to college, and I didn't know anyone. The first day, I was frightened to even get out of my car. I don't know why I was so scared." Another student said that she felt alienated from other students: "I secretly felt like I wasn't good enough and that the other students and my professors were judging me. I felt alienated from everything that was going on around me. I cried every night when I got home." In both cases, the students felt as if they did not belong to the college community in some way. Janet said she felt like it was all a mistake: "I kept thinking that someone was going to tell me that my grades weren't good enough and that I would have to leave. I felt like I would wake up from a dream and still be back at home not doing anything." These students did not have close family or friends who could prepare them for the experience of being a college student. For these first-generation college students, expectations about college were oftentimes skewed by high school teachers, parents, television and film, and their own desires for a way out of their particular situations. Jonathan described it clearly: "I needed to get away from my parents. If I didn't go to school, I would have had to start mining just like my dad and my grandfather. I knew going to school would get me away from all that." Another student commented on her feelings about the campus: "Mostly I was just kind of scared cause I didn't know where I was going, cause all the buildings were so huge compared to our little high school. I had problems finding where I was going, and I felt lost most of the time, but after awhile I loved it."

## On the Outside Looking In

The theme of transformation emerged from the constant comparison process as something that students did not necessarily appreciate until they were asked to consider how they had changed as a result of their study at ETSU. Maggie captured the feelings of several students succinctly when she said that during her first semester she felt like she was always “on the outside looking in” at other students, professors, and the campus culture around her. She did not understand the vocabulary of college life or the necessary moves that constitute a successful matriculation process. She embarrassed herself on the first day of class by asking a professor where she would find her homeroom, and she reported crying herself to sleep every night during the first week of class. Maggie felt very alone even though some of her friends also enrolled at ETSU the same semester. Only one of her high school friends had a class with her, and she did not make friends easily. Maggie reported that she was scared to ask questions in class or approach her professors after her initial embarrassing moment. Her personal identity did not carry a college student personality, thus she found it difficult to engage with her fellow students and professors.

When asked about the transformational aspects of higher education, most of the students in this study had little to say. Those who did comment focused on the learning experience and how it made them think about diverse perspectives. One student, Jonathan, did comment on changes in his own life that were in direct relation to his work at ETSU. "I didn't think I would change when I started taking classes here. I was set in my ways. Then, I realized that I was thinking differently about issues than I had before." I asked Jonathan to elaborate. "We had to discuss gay marriage in one class. I was against it when I started reading the stuff in the book, but then I changed my mind. I couldn't figure out how two men or two women marrying would

hurt me, so I changed my mind about it." Jonathan added one last qualifier to his statement: "I haven't told my parents yet, and I don't plan on telling them." We laughed about his dilemma, and Jonathan offered the notion that he has to stay "in the closet" about some of his new beliefs when he is around his parents and extended family and friends. "I feel like I've changed, but I don't think they would understand."

Sherry recounted how taking a women's studies course opened her eyes to a truth she had suspected for a long time: "The class made me think about what it means to be a woman but also a human being. I can take care of myself. And going to school is all about taking care of myself first. It's for me. I'm the first person in my family to go to school, and I intend to take full advantage of everything I can while I'm here." A student who had taken a women's studies course told a story about how she persuaded her mother to take a second look at life:

For as long as I can remember, my mom and dad have worked. They didn't go to college, but they have worked hard to make sure we had everything we needed. Thing is, when they got home from work, mom continued working while dad watched television or spent time with his friends. Mom had to clean the house, cook dinner, and look after us kids. When I was taking the women's studies course, I brought her some of the essays we read in class. As part of a project for class, I interviewed her. She said that she never questioned the way things were in life. I kind of felt like it was my responsibility to get my mom thinking a little bit. After she read the articles from class, mom decided that it was okay for her to sit down and rest after work and let dad take care of dinner or use the vacuum. Dad didn't like it very much, but that's okay, too. [Laughter] Seriously, he was angry at first, but he's dealing with it. Mom says that things have to be more equal at home. I hope dad learns to agree with her.

For this first-generation student, college provided the means by which she could bring a positive change into her mother's life. She could use her new knowledge to help her mother, which is part of the obligation theme in the research.

Even in transformation these students remember family and home. For many of them, home culture trumps college culture, which suggests that the transformation of identity so often associated with higher education (Gammell, 2006) is still in process with students in their first or second year of study at ETSU, particularly those who are first-generation and from Southern Appalachia where family tends to trump most other relationships (Beaver, 1991).

#### Joseph Campbell and the Hero's Journey

In Chapter 1 (pg. 14) I advanced the notion that Campbell's theory of the hero's journey (1949) might be a useful matrix onto which one can project first-generation students' experiences with and perceptions of higher education. The archetypal hero appears as the central character of Campbell's basic narrative model. This character represents in metaphorical terms the summation of diverse cultures' ideas concerning the model or ideal hero, much like American cowboys. For the purposes of this study Campbell's narrative model can be applied to the foundational aspects of the students' narratives that constitute the data for this grounded theory project. In essence the students who shared their stories for this project represent heroes in their own right. Like Campbell's hero, these students have entered into an adventure unlike anything they have experienced before. They are the heroes of their own stories. Moreover, their experiences are similar to Campbell's narrative model. In Campbell's structure the hero accepts the call to adventure and begins a fantastic journey accompanied by "magical beings" that assist him with various tests and challenges along the way. If the hero is persistent and wise, he will

achieve the coveted prize, which he can then take back home and share with those who stayed behind.

Campbell's narrative model is useable precisely because it is metaphorical. It provides a framework upon which students and scholars can conceptualize the experience of higher education from the perspective of a journey, perhaps a journey toward enlightenment. A student can view his or her journey through higher education as something more momentous than simply a list of courses to take toward a degree. Professors, administrators, and support staff can view the journey from the perspective of Campbell's magical beings. It is worth noting that magical beings can also be tricksters; however, most beings exist to help the hero. In my own experiences in higher education, I can count many such beings who have assisted me in various ways. Likewise, I have been able to return that favor with students and colleagues along the way. What works for me is the knowledge that the journey is as important as the final prize. In a sense applying Campbell's narrative model to the experience of higher education engages students in a more constructivist relationship with their own learning journey.

#### My Own Story

I am the fifth of five children, born late to parents who came into their own during World War II and the rise of American Dream capitalism during the 1950s. Indeed, my parents built their American Dream according to the very best standards of the day in East Tennessee. My father worked for Clinchfield Railroad and joined the local chapter of the United Transportation Union. My mother was a traditional homemaker. Together, my parents thrived in the booming social and financial economy of the 1950s and 1960s. With my father's salary, my parents purchased land and built a beautiful home. They saved money, went on vacations to Disney World and Myrtle Beach, and were happy. They also grew a garden each year and spent their



money wisely. They did not own credit cards except for a few department store cards that my mother used from time to time. And when it came time for college, my parents offered each of their children the ultimate "scholarship." They told us that they would pay our way through college. We wouldn't have to work our way through to a bachelor's degree. My brothers and sisters took advantage of their offer to varying degrees, but I was the only one to finish a degree and go on to graduate school. True to their word, my parents paid my way through undergraduate studies and even managed to provide me with a car passed down from my father when he bought a new car.

Although my parents made it clear that they would pay for my college education, they did not push me to attend college. They were not familiar with the college experience. They graduated from high school and had a good life, but my parents did not attend college. As a result the decision to attend college was left to me.

When I was a child my parents read to me regularly, and they encouraged me to watch PBS when it started airing in the late 60s. My parents were old school liberals in that regard, but they were financially conservative, which meant that they could send me to college, pay the bills, and not feel a financial pinch at home.

My mother wanted me to study whatever made me happy. My father was more practical. He wanted me to study business. Sometimes I wish I had taken my father's advice, but I don't have regrets about my studies or my career. My mother's advice won the day, and I chose to study English and become an English teacher. Both of my parents were extremely proud of me, even though they did not make much of a big deal about my accomplishments.

I owe so much of my current situation in life to my parents. My parents were from a different time. Their lifestyle exists today as more of an anachronism than an actual way of life

for most Americans. Nearly all of the students I interviewed for this project come from lifestyles that would have been outside my parents' experiences. They come from single-parent homes or homes in which both parents work outside the home. These students work to pay for their education, and they have credit card debt. More importantly, they view higher education through a pragmatic lens that focuses on career rather than education. Their relationship with higher education is not predicated on the idea of "culture" as much as it is on the idea of "practical" learning.

As I listened to the students tell me about their lives, I learned some things about myself, too. I did not remember the feelings of alienation that some of the students talked about, but their stories brought back those feelings clearly. I can remember thinking that I was somehow missing out on something that others students knew already. I had no support services available to help me deal with my feelings, so I dealt with them in silence. In one sense, my desire to research first-generation students comes from own experiences. My desire also goes back to the student who did not believe in dinosaurs. For more than 20 years now I have thought about that student. I have wondered what happened to him after he dropped out of college. Even more than my own feelings from undergraduate studies, it has been my memory of that single student that has fueled my enthusiasm for this topic.

#### Implications for Practice

The primary implication for practice I would recommend would be a central clearinghouse of information at ETSU concerning first-generation students. Evidence from administrators at the school suggests that first-generation students make up a sizable percentage of enrolled students; however, there is no clear agreement among administrators as to the number of first-generation students currently enrolled at the university. Numbers range from a low of

approximately 25% to a high of nearly 60%. It would be in the school's best interests to know more about this particular student demographic and work to both encourage first-generation students to study at ETSU and to facilitate the process once those students are enrolled. Recent changes to funding formulas for higher education in the TBR system that now include graduation rates as well as total enrollment indicate that ETSU should make sure that as many first-generation students proceed to graduation as possible.

From my research I have identified three programs that might serve as models for ETSU. The first program is located at the University of Florida in Gainesville. It is titled the Florida Opportunity Scholars program and offers deserving first-generation students full scholarships through a series of grants. The program has been part of the UF system since 2006 and graduated its first group of students in the spring 2010 graduating class. In addition to financial aid, students in the program "are assigned a peer mentor and are required to take a first-year seminar class and attend financial-literacy and career-preparation workshops" (Florida Opportunity Scholars).

The second program is titled "University 101" and was developed at the University of South Carolina by John Gardner. "University 101" has been implemented and studied by a large number of institutions across the U.S. According to Gardner in a presentation at the SACS Summer Institute 2010, schools should work toward creating a "grand design" that meshes specific information about targeted students with established missions and goals of the school. Gardner argues that such designs result in improved coordination, integration, and coherency of data and programs.

The third program is an extension of Gardner's "University 101" that was designed at California State University/Dominguez Hills where nearly 80% of the student body is first-

generation. The TORO program is a year-long “University 101” course of study that is taught to first-generation cohort groups and includes academic work and social assignments meant to introduce cohort participants to the culture of higher education. Successful cohort participants are encouraged to serve as student mentors in future TORO courses (Horwedal).

### Implications for Further Research

Through studies like this there exists the potential for expanded leadership studies at ETSU that focus on first-generation students as ambassadors of higher education within the geographical area served by the school, especially areas of Southern Appalachia that represent these students’ home culture. Just as Maggie experienced an epiphany during the interview for this project about her own role as a college student, first-generation students need to understand that their journey through higher education propels them toward transformational experiences.

Further research with first-generation students should include older and returning students in the system as well as students who choose to drop out of school. Another area for research would be first-generation students who are identified as minority, including, among others, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

In early 2010 The Tennessee Board of Regents mandated a change to the funding formula for higher education to include graduation rates. Doing so poses an opportunity for further qualitative research into first-generation students’ expectations of and experiences with higher education in order to gain a better understanding of why some students finish their degrees and others do not. According to the 2009 Factbook, ETSU has a 4-year graduation rate of 16% and a 6-year graduation rate of 39%. Qualitative research data are needed to ascertain the reasons behind these low graduation rates.

## Summary

Laura referred to the Tri-Cities as being an “improved Appalachia” where “coal families...sent their kids to make a better life....” Audrey turned her back on the same region, describing it as “too fast” and mean-spirited. At either extreme, one might argue that ETSU and the Tri-Cities region represent a doorway to the larger American culture for many people from Southern Appalachia, especially potential college students for whom higher education is a necessary first step toward a career outside the traditional jobs that have defined the area, such as coal mining and farming.

The students in this study are familiar with all the stereotypes that typically define life in Southern Appalachia. They have seen the “holler” people, and most of them can trace their family heritage to very similar hollers in East Tennessee, Western Kentucky, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina. Like the idea of an “improved Appalachia,” these students bring a sense of grounded reality coupled with a burgeoning idealism about their region of the country as they matriculate through the ETSU system. They want to do well, but they do not necessarily wish to turn their backs on their home culture. They begin on the outside looking in, but eventually they arrive inside. They take their place within the university. They learn from and, in turn, teach those around them about what it means to be a first-generation college student from Southern Appalachia.

Chapter 5 includes analysis of the major themes and some of the minor themes that define this study. It includes information related to potential practice within the ETSU academic community and to further research regarding first-generation students.

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## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

Interview Script  
Michael Briggs

#### Unstructured Interview Script “First-Generation Students’ Perceptions of Higher Education”

##### *I. Introduction*

- A. Sign Informed Consent Form—Ask each interviewee to read and sign the informed consent form. Give the interviewee a copy of the signed form.
- B. I would like to thank you for your willingness to talk with me about your perceptions of higher education. I will use your words to develop a theoretical framework explaining the phenomenon of “first-generation students from Southern Appalachia choosing to pursue higher education.” This interview is part of my doctoral dissertation; therefore, your participation in this study is critically important. Your words, and the resulting theoretical framework, will also be part of a manuscript I will submit to scholarly journals, which, if published, will help administrators and professors build new programs that will assist future first-generation students to move through their college years with a high degree of confidence and success.
- C. I assure you that your participation in this study will remain anonymous. I may quote you in my final research report. However, I will not use your name in association with these quotes, nor will I use any identifiers that might link you to your words. This session should take approximately one-hour. I am tape-recording this session to have an accurate record of your comments. Do you have any questions before I begin the tape recorder?

D. Turn-on tape recorder – Do I have your permission to tape record this session?

## *II. Guiding Questions*

1. Imagine that it is your very first day on campus as an incoming freshman. What was that day like? What were you feeling as you walked to your first college class?
2. Describe how your family and friends reacted to your decision to come to college. Did they support you? How do they act now that you have completed a few semesters of college work?
3. Have your experiences in college changed the way you think about yourself? Do you think that other people perceive a change in you now that you are a college student?
4. Imagine that I am a high school senior. I plan to attend college in the fall and will be a first-generation student. What advise would you give me about college?

## *III. Conclusion*

- A.** Based on the information that you have given me, I sense that you feel \_\_\_\_\_ about being a first-generation college student from Southern Appalachia. Is my summary correct? Please remember that I plan to publish my findings. Based on your experiences with the decision to enroll in college, what would you want to emphasize about your decision?
- B.** That concludes our session. Do you have any additional comments before I stop the tape-recorder?
- C.** Turn-off the tape recorder – Do you have any additional comments off the record?

Again, I wish to thank you for your participation in this study.



## APPENDIX B

### Request for Interview Email

The following email, with appropriate modifications, will be sent to potential interview participants who have graduated.

Dear

I am pursuing a doctoral degree in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) program at East Tennessee State University. To finish my studies, I am writing a dissertation dealing with first-generation college students from Southern Appalachia.

I am interested in finding out what motivates first-generation students to attend college and complete a four-year degree, and I would like to interview you. The information you share with me might very well help future first-generation students navigate college life with a little more confidence.

Your interview will last approximately 1 hour and will be taped for later transcription and analysis. Your anonymity is extremely important, and all measures will be taken to guard your identity during all phases of the research process, including the storage of interview tapes and transcripts after the project is finished. Furthermore, your participation is completely voluntary. Should you decide to leave the project at any time, your interview tapes and transcripts will be destroyed. If you continue with the project, you will be invited to review the transcript of your interview and the dissertation text before the project is finalized.

If you are still interested in being interviewed, please contact me by return email by (date) so that we can schedule an appointment for the interview.

Sincerely,

Michael Briggs  
E.T.S.U. Doctoral candidate  
Email: [briggsm@etsu.edu](mailto:briggsm@etsu.edu)

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

#### PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research study is as follows:

To explore perceptions and experiences of first-generation college students from Southern Appalachia enrolled at or graduated from East Tennessee State University.

#### DURATION:

You will participate in one interview lasting approximately one hour in July, 2008.

#### PROCEDURES

The procedures, which will involve you as a research subject, include:

One interview and, if you desire, a review of the transcripts and the findings. The researcher will tape record your interview to ensure complete recall of the interview. The tape will be destroyed on completion of the data analysis phase.

#### ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS

The alternative procedures/treatments available to you if you elect not to participate in this study are:

There are no alternative procedures available for this study if you elect not to participate. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time or withdraw any comments you made during the interview process without fear of harassment.

#### POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

The possible risks and/or discomforts of your involvement include:

There is a slight risk that your confidentiality will be breached, even though all measures will be taken to safeguard your identity.

## POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The possible benefits of your participation are:

You will receive a copy of the final research report to review. The primary benefit of your participation in this study is to share your perceptions and opinions about being a first-generation college student from Southern Appalachia with other students, scholars, and administrators; however, you will receive no direct benefit from the research other than the experience of participating in a scholarly research project. The findings from this research will be submitted for publication in an academic journal.

## FINANCIAL COSTS

There are no additional costs to participants that may result from participation in the research.

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, all tapes and transcripts from your interview will be destroyed. You may quit by calling the researcher, Michael Briggs, whose phone number is 423-341-1555.

## CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you may call Aracelis Vasquez, IRB Coordinator, at 423-439-6002 or Beth Aimee Every, IRB Secretary, at 423-439-6053. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439/6002.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in Burlison Hall on the ETSU campus for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research (Michael Briggs) have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask

questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

---

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

---

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

---

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE

---

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)

DATE

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Transcripts

#### **Audrey**

Interviewer: Audrey, it is great to see you again.

Respondent: You, too.

Interviewer: Audrey, we're going to begin with a few questions about your background.

Respondent: Great.

Interviewer: Okay, tell me a bit about where you're from, what you're studying at ETSU, that kind of thing.

Respondent: Well, I'm from Bakersville, North Carolina, which is just over the line from Tennessee.

Interviewer: That's right. I've been there many times. I enjoyed the art studio tour last year.

Respondent: Everybody likes the tour. We get people from all over the world visiting then. It's amazing. I think it has something to do with Asheville, too. And there are loads of artists in the area.

Interviewer: Yes, as I recall there were nearly eighty artists listed on the last tour.

Respondent: Yeah, there are studios all over the place. It's pretty interesting. It's also kind of strange. It's like the "folksy" version of Appalachia that people like.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Respondent: Well, it's more of an artsy thing. People like to see the barefoot mountain mama or the mountain man as if they existed a hundred years ago and are living fossils now.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Are you talking about the artists who are like living fossils?

Respondent: They play a part for the people who visit. People want to see the mountain people doing their art.

Interviewer: I see. I'll have to pay more attention to that the next time I visit studios around Bakersville.

Respondent: You can't miss it.

Interviewer: Is your family originally from Bakersville?

Respondent: Oh, yes. We've been there for ages, as far back as I can remember with my grandparents and their parents before them. I have pictures of my great-grandparents and their children visiting up on Iron Mountain between Tennessee and North Carolina. And I know my relatives lived in the area before that, too. I've heard all kinds of stories from my parents and grandparents.

Interviewer: That's excellent, Audrey. Having all that sense of place in your family must be very nice.

Respondent: [Laughing] I can't go anywhere without running into a cousin. I even have cousins in Johnson City and Erwin.

Interviewer: You have a large family, indeed. [laughing] Do you know most of your relatives?

Respondent: Well, I've met some of my Tennessee relatives since coming to school here. There are lots of them, so it's hard to meet everyone.

Interviewer: So, Audrey, what is your major at ETSU?

Respondent: I am a nursing major.

Interviewer: Before you made the decision to pursue nursing were you familiar with ETSU?

Respondent: Yes, I made several student tours with my high school.

Interviewer: What did you think of the school when you first visited?

Respondent: [Laughter] At first I was scared. The campus seemed so huge compared to my little high school. My graduating class had about 30 students, and this campus seemed like a city compared to home. When I started taking classes, I felt like I didn't belong at first. I wanted to give up, but I kept thinking about what I would do back home, so I stuck it out. It's been hard, but I'm beginning to like it more now.

Interviewer: Well, I'm glad you stuck it out!

Respondent: Me, too.

Interviewer: When you were in high school, did your teachers talk about the importance of going to college.

Respondent: Yeah, it was to a point. Mostly not teachers, though. It was mainly guidance. We only had two guidance counselors, but they pushed the idea of going to college.

Interviewer: Audrey, tell me about your first day of college. Do you remember your first day?

What was it like? What kind of experiences did you have that day?

Respondent: I guess it was more overwhelming yet exciting at the same time to have the opportunity to go to school, which was something that I didn't feel like I could have had if it wouldn't have been for like several people in my life really pushing me and helping me get to that point. So, I guess overwhelming and excitement, yet nervous, too when I got there. Maybe fear of not succeeding, or something like that.

Interviewer: What about the people in your life, your family and friends? Did they encourage you to go to college?

Respondent: Umm, I guess maybe I would say my mom pushed me to go to school because she didn't have that opportunity to go to school and she had to work for everything she had and maybe had to lean on other people more than she wanted to.

Interviewer: What about other forms of support, such as money for tuition?

Respondent: Oh, yes. I received help from my grandparents. And I often say that if hadn't been for them I probably wouldn't be here.

Interviewer: Did they talk to you about the importance of higher ed? Going to college?

Respondent: Yes. Mainly because I told them I wanted to become a nurse. And my grandmother is a CNA--certified nursing assistant--and she always wanted to further her education to become either a registered nurse or higher, so she pushes me to specialize in something or, I don't know, she doesn't want me to be like her.

Interviewer: Was your family glad you chose a nursing major?

Respondent: Oh, they were very excited that I wanted to become a nurse. They wanted me to go to school to do that. They were very supportive. I know a lot of people would assume that they would say they were above their raising, or something like that, but mine weren't like that at all. They were more like excited and wanted me to have what maybe they didn't have.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that, Audrey? About maybe having things in life that they didn't have?

Respondent: It's a burden in some ways, because I feel that I have to do well to please them. And it's a good thing, too, because I know my education will allow me to take care of them later on. I'm doing this for my family as much as for me.

Interviewer: How about your friends? How did they feel about you going away to study nursing at ETSU?

Respondent: My friends from high school, they were like, it was just one of those things: you

went to college. There was no question about it. You know it wasn't even considered that you would go out into the work force after you finished high school. So, almost all of my friends from high school are now attending colleges or universities, like Appalachian State, UNC Greensboro. They're all going for something like that, so I didn't really have any friends that didn't actually go to a college. But, I know a lot of people outside my family. Acquaintances. They were like well she's going away to become a nurse, and she isn't happy with small town life. Some people thought it was like I thought I was better than them or something. They were like, Bakersville wasn't good enough for Audrey.

Interviewer: That's pretty amazing for your graduating class. Tell me a bit about your class.

Respondent: Um, it was small. There was 85 in my graduating class [laugh]. Very close-knit group of friends and teachers. I keep in touch with my friends--the close ones--through email and facebook. I keep in touch with them a lot. Maybe I don't get to see them a lot, keep in touch with them through the Internet.

Interviewer: Do you think the Internet has changed students' ability to stay in touch with family and friends?

Respondent: Oh yes, definitely. You can email them through the Internet or send them cards for their birthdays. And of course there's Facebook and MySpace where you can constantly check up on them and let them know you're thinking about them. But still, I feel like things are happening there that don't include me anymore. Life goes on.

Interviewer: How about your mom and grandparents? How often do you communicate with them? How often do you get to see them?

Respondent: Well, with them, most of the time, I occasionally go home on the weekends, and I'll spend an entire weekend just splitting time between everyone, and they mail me things through the mail, and I send them cards and things like that, so we communicate through that. My grandparents aren't...they don't use technology like that. My mom doesn't even know how to turn on a computer. [laughter] She doesn't! I mean, we have a computer, but she doesn't know how to use it. So, that doesn't help with the email.

Interviewer: What about your own experiences with computer technology at school?

Respondent: I'm okay now, but it was frustrating at first.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Respondent: It was kind of embarrassing. I didn't know what Google was when I started here. I had seen the commercials about Google and the ads everywhere, but I never bothered to look at it. The very first day of classes at ETSU, my English teacher told us to use Google to find out about a topic we were discussing. I was lost.

Interviewer: Did you find out that Google is pretty easy to use?



Respondent: [Laughter] I felt lucky because my English teacher used it in class. I went home and did the same thing he did. That's how I learned it.

Interviewer: Well, that's okay. You learned it, and that's all that matters. Audrey, one of the things we discussed when you agreed to do this interview was your Appalachian heritage. Let's talk about that for a moment. What does your Appalachian heritage mean to you?

Respondent: I've been thinking about that. For me, it's about my family ties and the things that I consider important in my family.

Interviewer: Could you expand on that?

Respondent: We're all very close in my family, and we look after each other. People are kind to one another.

Interviewer: Do you think about being Appalachian?

Respondent: No, not really. I hear people say they are hillbillies or rednecks, but I guess I didn't think about it much.

Interviewer: If you use a term to describe your culture, what would it be? Would you use Appalachian or Southern?

Respondent: Southern.

Interviewer: Is there a difference?

Respondent: Um, maybe that Appalachian is Southerner from the mountains. Something like that. People believe just because I have an accent that I'm not able to be intellectual or have any sort of sophistication. There are several stereotypes I'm aware of, peoples' first thought of Appalachia is a bunch of hillbillies living in a trailer park with mullets.

Interviewer: Stereotypes?

Respondent: Yes. Definitely. I don't like stereotypes, so that's why I prefer Southerner.

Interviewer: Do you have any fond memories of things in your life you might describe as Appalachian?

Respondent: When I go home on weekends, I look forward to soup beans and cornbread with mammaw and hearing all the family gossip from my mom. Family things like that. And the food.

Interviewer: Do you consider soup beans and cornbread to be Appalachian?

Respondent: It seems to be, but I figured college wasn't the place to talk about soup beans. It wasn't what I wanted to learn about."

Interviewer: Have you learned differently now?

Respondent: Yeah. A few of my professors have brought up things like that, like Appalachian cultural things in class. It's been interesting.

Interviewer: Okay, let's change gears for a few minutes and refocus on your work here at the university.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: Tell me about your first day on campus. And your first class. What was that like?

Respondent: Yeah, well it was different from high school. You looked at it in a different way. It's more meaningful and you're actually gaining something. You know, in high school I guess it's all just like let's get this over with. Whatever. But maybe it was like you were more focused on learning and to becoming something better. And you put more effort into something because you know one day you'll eventually get something out of it.

Interviewer: What was your comfort level when you first started taking classes?

Respondent: Well, comfortable in a sense, but more nervous, you know. To be there and to not exactly be familiar with anything, you know. I'd never lived outside of home. I'd never walked to classes. I didn't know where many of the buildings were. So it was just unfamiliar territory for me.

Interviewer: Did you live on campus?

Respondent: Yes. And it was kind of scary, you know.

Interviewer: How so?

Respondent: Well, mostly because I didn't know my roommate. That was the most scary thing about it, because you could really end up with anyone, you know. But, I actually ended up with a fabulous roommate who is from Nashville. We're very different, maybe like total opposites, but living in a dorm sometimes is a challenge. Things are so different. And a tight space. You have to walk down the hall to shower. Things like that. That was very different.

Interviewer: Do you think it was good for you to have a roommate who was very different?

Respondent: Well, it was scary at first, but we became really good friends, and it was a good thing because I learned a lot from her. She's used to living in a city, and I am very country. She's visited my home, and I've been to Nashville with her. It's been great!

Interviewer: Imagine for a moment that I am a high school senior over in Bakersville. What would you tell me about college?

Respondent: Well, I think you should expect it to be challenging. You should go into it with the knowledge that going to college will be an emotional and difficult change, especially if you aren't going to stay at home and commute. You're going to have to be open to meeting new people and if you're going to be staying on campus, be open to meeting a new roommate and how they may be different from you and how you kinda have to accept that.

Interviewer: What about staying on campus? Is it a good thing for freshmen?

Respondent: I recommend it, because I think you can learn...I just know that I've learned and got to know so many different people that I might not associate with if I stayed in an apartment. But with staying in a dorm, the girls on my hall, we've all become really tight. I know them really well, and I feel like I learn better skills to get to know people and just to communicate with people that may be completely different from who you are.

Interviewer: So, Audrey, do you think college has changed you in any way?

Respondent: I guess it's made me more responsible and maybe appreciate the opportunity of being here more. You know I just constantly think this is just such an opportunity to be here, and I really do try to take advantage of it, you know, every chance I get. You know, I don't want to be one of those students that doesn't care and then looks back and says, Oh man, I wish I would have finished. I wish I would have done this or that differently.

Interviewer: You're positive that you're going to get that degree?

Respondent: Yes, you know I know a family friend of ours, a male that went to UT and he was supposed to get a construction degree of some sort, and he went for seven years, and he needed only three more credit hours to finish, and I don't want to be like that.

Interviewer: Well, let's go back to your career choice. How did you come to settle on nursing? Did your grandmother influence you?

Respondent: Yeah, whenever I was a freshman in high school, I started taking this allied health classes. We had a fabulous teacher, who really got into it and taught us a lot of things, and actually, when I was a senior in high school they had a certified nursing assistant program, and I got into that program and finished it, so I already have my CNA. I figured that if I liked being a CNA, I'd love to be a nurse, or even further to specialize in something.

Interviewer: Does being a first-generation college student influence your choices in college?

Respondent: I'm definitely more aware of the fact that I am doing something special. I want to make sure that I don't mess it up. I have this great opportunity, but I have to be careful

not to end up like my friend at UT.

Interviewer: What would you tell other first-generation college students?

Respondent: I would tell them to work hard, and it may be challenging financially. It may be challenging in many other ways, but, you know, work as hard as you can to finish and don't let anyone hold you back. I know that a lot of first gen students didn't have a lot of support going into this, because it was different from what they were accustomed to, and don't let that let them fall back.

Interviewer: What about challenges? Have you experienced any particular challenges at ETSU?

Respondent: The biggest challenges would be meeting new people, getting to know new people, accepting them for who they are. It can be tough for people, like me, who are from small towns and who have known all the same people all of their lives.

Interviewer: Is diversity a good thing at college?

Respondent: Definitely. It makes you think about the world beyond Bakersville and North Carolina and even ETSU. It makes you aware of other people.

Interviewer: What about dealing with the university? Have you encountered any challenges there?

Respondent: There's always challenges, you know, like dealing with financial aid. It seems like there's always challenges there.

Interviewer: Have you had trouble there?

Respondent: Yes, well, I guess most of the financial aid money would go to TN residents, even though I get in-state tuition, it was very challenging to get any money, especially based on my family's income.

Interviewer: What about challenges in the classroom?

Respondent: Yeah, it's very different, that's for sure. You have a lot more freedom, and I guess you could take advantage of that or actually, well, I don't know.

Interviewer: What do you mean by "freedom"?

Respondent: Well, it's like in class when your professor is talking about something. You can ask questions and talk with your professor. High School wasn't like that at all. We were just supposed to sit there and listen, but in college we have the freedom to talk. It's kind of scary. Sometimes I don't want to talk very much in class. And professors talk about things that we never talked about in high school classes.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Respondent: I like it. I like that professors can talk about anything. It makes you think, you know. But some people feel uncomfortable. I've heard people complain that professors shouldn't talk about certain things.

Interviewer: Such as?

Respondent: Well, like controversial things. Religion. Sex. Things like that.

Interviewer: Do you consider such topics to be appropriate?

Respondent: Sure. It's all appropriate if it makes you think. I like that. It's what makes college so interesting.

Interviewer: Would you consider that to be part of college culture?

Respondent: Yes. we visited a museum or two when I was in 1010 last semester, and I enjoyed it. I think you can better yourself by taking advantage of all the stuff going on at the university. This is a turning point in my life. It's a whole different world that could bring you to something completely better, something further, something to help your life. You know, whenever you get a degree, you're going to be able to better your life and maybe, you know, help people. College helps you understand people and work with them. You don't fear so many things if you go to college, I guess.

Interviewer: That's an interesting thought. Does college help you to conquer your fears?

Respondent: Yeah, right. That's part of the reason you are here. To get to know your self better and better yourself and to deal with your fears about things that are different. That's why I'm here. It's not just for nursing.

Interviewer: Would you say that going to college is like a journey?

Respondent: Oh, yes. Very much. It's a journey to know who you are and what your place is in this world.

Interviewer: that's very good, Audrey. I agree with you. It's definitely a journey.

Respondent: I just wish it was a cheaper journey! [laughter]

**Follow-up Email:**

Interviewer: During our initial interview, you mentioned soups beans and cornbread and how you didn't think such things were appropriate for classroom discussion in college. Could you expand on your experience with such discussions?

Respondent: I didn't think talking about things like soup beans and cornbread or moonshine was appropriate. I figured my professors would look down on me. I couldn't hardly believe it when one of my professors talked about drinking moonshine, and a couple of my professors have mentioned cornbread in class. At first, it was sort of strange, like they were making fun, but they were serious. After that, I didn't feel so weird about mentioning those things. I felt like they respected my background, and that made me feel more comfortable in class.

## Janet

Interviewer: Janet, tell me a bit about yourself.

Respondent: OK I'm from Turtletown, TN. And it's the very southeast corner of Tennessee. It's a very, very poor little area. Very poverty stricken and I'm actually the first person in my family to go to college. And I liked ETSU because it's not too big and it's not too small. It seemed just right for me.

Interviewer: What is your Major?

Respondent: Psychology with a concentration in behavioral neuro-science

Interviewer: How did you come to pick that?

Respondent: Um, I was originally pre-med and I just lost all my desire for that. Cause the profession's so corrupt and I got into Psychology and I really loved it so I changed to that.

Interviewer: How long have you been here at ETSU?

Respondent: I'm a sophomore, second semester sophomore

Interviewer: Do you like it here?

Respondent: I do, I love it. I'm probably gonna permantley move up here.

Interviewer: It is nice up here.

Respondent: It is its just right. Yeah

Interviewer: We'll come back to that later when I ask more questions about ETSU.

Respondent: OK

Interviewer: Think back to first day on campus when you were a freshman. Think about what that was like, what you were going through, your mind that first day and what were you feeling when you walked to your very first college class.

Respondent: Um, I was absolutely terrified because my High School only (inaudible) the high school and middle school combined there were only 315 students and in my graduating senior class there were only 48 students. And a very small building and I was just absolutely terrified cause I knew my first class would be huge, I had no idea where I was going. I wasn't used to having to walk so far to get to class cause it's all in one building I was just I was lost. I almost started crying. (laugh) It was very traumatic but I got through it.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your first class was?

Respondent: Oh I wish I could, let's see, (pause) oh it was um U.S. History up to 1877

Interviewer: And was it as you feared it was going to be?

Respondent: Was it a huge class? No, it was about the same size as my high school class, um it wasn't scary as I thought it would be it wasn't nearly as big as I thought it would be. But it was over in Rogers Stout so it was one of the smaller rooms.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to get comfortable with being a college student and being here on campus?

Respondent: It took me about half of a semester to really get comfortable cause it's so different from at home. Cause at home you have where I'm from you have to drive 45 minutes to get to a Walmart. And here it's just down the road and I mean it was a huge cultural change and shock. So it took me about half it took me about six weeks I guess for me to really get into the swing of things. I kept thinking that someone was going to tell me that my grades weren't good enough and that I would have to leave. I felt like I would wake up from a dream and still be back at home not doing anything.

Interviewer: What about being a college student, how did that make you feel?

Respondent: I was just really proud of myself that I made it that far cause most the people in my family haven't even never even graduated high school so I was really really proud. And I felt really honored and privileged to be here.

Interviewer: When did you decide to come to college?

Respondent: Oh, when I was five

Interviewer: Did your parents talk to you about it?

Respondent: Yea, my mom. Um, I lived in a single parent home, and she had always said, "Cassie I want you to go to college but it's your decision, but I'd like for you to. I want better things for you than this life." She always kinda drilled it that I needed to go to college.

Interviewer: What does your mom do?

Respondent: She is a produce worker at the Piggly Wiggly where I'm from.

Interviewer: Does she still do that?

Respondent: Yes



Interviewer: Did she have her own ideas of what you should major in?

Respondent: No she's very supportive of me and my sister. I have a little sister and mom's very supportive of anything we want to do. She backs us 100 %. She's very open and accepting of whatever we want to do.

Interviewer: Do you see part of what you're doing here as a student is part of that in a way to help out your mom as well?

Respondent: Yes yes that's one of the main goals is to get my mom out of the area we live in. I want to move her up here with me and build her a house. Cause where I'm from it's just it's so bad. It's below the poverty level.

Interviewer: Now tell me again, it's in the Southeast corner?

Respondent: Yeah it's in Polk County. Very drug ridden.

Interviewer: Is that near Chattanooga?

Respondent: It's about an hour and 15 minutes East of Chattanooga. Do you know about the Ocoee River? It's on the Ocoee River. It's right off there.

Interviewer: What about the people you graduated with do you keep in touch with any of those people?

Respondent: I really don't because I'm one of the only ones that actually went to college and stuck with it. The rest of them are either married and have babies and are working at some dead end job. And they don't have any you know bright outlook. They don't see anything more for themselves. So there's a few close friends that I do stay in contact with. But most of them I don't talk to.

Interviewer: Do you think that your experiences with your mom and your experiences here that has sort have made it difficult for you to see their way of life?

Respondent: Oh yeah, definitely cause I can't, I can't see just settling for coming right out of high school and getting married and having babies and you know working at the Piggly Wiggly for the rest of my life. I just can't see that cause I know I have so much more potential and there's so much more I can do. And like I'm one of those people who like I wanna change the world. (laughing) That's me. And even if I can change a small part of the world, that would make me happy.

Interviewer: Well change starts with you. Yeah.

Interviewer: Your friends that you've stayed in touch with, have they gone onto college?

Respondent: Um, most of them are in community college. Cause they have Cleveland

State Community College, I don't know if you know about that. But most of them are in there.

Interviewer: How do they feel about you coming up here to ETSU?

Respondent: They think I'm crazy but they're like "I don't know how you can go so far away from home." Cause it's three and a half hours away, where I live. And they're like I don't know how you can do it, I can't handle not seeing my family and I can't handle devoting all my time to school. They think I'm crazy and I have seven more years of school after this. Cause I'm going to get my PhD in clinical neuro- psychology, so. (laugh)

Interviewer: So you understand what they say maybe about family?

Respondent: Yeah, I completely under... I, I love my family. I miss them so much. But I'm doing this so I can give them more and do more for my own family one day.

Interviewer: Now I know your Mom supports you but how about your other family members?

Respondent: My Mom and my sister supportive but the rest of 'em want me back. They want me, my family is so strange. They're very old fashioned and very "women are dogs" type thing, like my Grandfather wants me to stay at home and work and give him all the money. Really? Yeah, it's a horrible, it's a horrible place, I'm, I'm just so happy to be gone from there. And, yeah I love 'em. I love 'em just the same. They're just not very supportive of me. They want me to come back.

Interviewer: Would you classify where you come from, Turtletown, as being Appalachian?

Respondent: Oh yes

Interviewer: How does it compare to Johnson City?

Respondent: Well, um, a lot of the people where I'm from don't even have running water. Really? Yeah, it's a poor area. My Uncle makes moonshine. Really? Yeah (laughing) yes, yeah Wow a lot of us don't have running water like at my home, it's not even really a house it's a shack. Um, there's only two bed... my mom has to sleep on the couch because she refuses to sleep in the bed when I'm home cause she wants me to sleep in the bed. She wants my sister to have her own bed. Some peoples (inaudible) has houses.

Interviewer: When you use terms to classify yourself, do you use words like "Appalachian" or "Southerner"?

Respondent: I use Southerner for the most part, but I also mean Appalachian. There's no getting away from that where I'm from.

Interviewer: When you came here had you visited the college beforehand?

Respondent: I had visited for orientation. I didn't really get to tour the campus or look around the city much because I was a very active high school student and I had to get back. But I had been here and I had seen it.

Interviewer: So you knew that Johnson City was going to be quite a bit different?

Respondent: Yes, I was very excited about it. (laughing) And I hear a lot of people say Johnson City is so boring and lame and it's just the most horrible place and I'm like no, you have no idea. (laughing) You have no clue.

Interviewer: Would you classify Johnson City Appalachian the same way as you would classify Turtletown?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Ok. Expand on that.

Respondent: Um I mean I do classify it Appalachian but where I'm from that's hard core mountain folk, Appalachian people. And there's only white people, only white. Um, Southern Baptist is the most dominant religion. There's a very few amount of, um, African- Americans, Hardly any Hispanic people at all. And they're very closed-minded people, the people where I'm from. They're not open to, um, any other religion, any other race, any other sexual orientation, they're just not open. It's just out of the question.

Interviewer: So Johnson City would be a more diverse place?

Respondent: Yes, much more diverse. I was in cultural shock when I came here cause the first day I saw, you know, like the Asian people and, you know, people from Africa, and I was just so excited. I was like "this is the most beautiful thing." I almost cried I was so excited. Wow yeah that's great well I'm glad you got to come here, definitely. Me too

Interviewer: Do you think people here are aware of places like Turtletown?

Respondent: They're not. Everyone I've talked to that I've become close enough with to actually tell them about my life and where I'm from and my background they're like "oh you're being dramatic". But actually Greg um he was like well I'm gonna investigate Turtletown myself so he and a few of his friends came to Turtletown over their Spring break Really And they were just in shock cause everything I said was true and they were just like I had no idea. Wow Yeah. Some people, cause I know there, there probably are (inaudible) amount of people at ETSU who are like me, who come from the same type of background. But most people just don't realize how good they have it.

Interviewer: You've completed just about two years, your mom and sister are supportive, Grandfather, maybe not so much... Have people in your family or friends kinda changed their opinion about going away to college now that you've been here this long?

Respondent: Not really. The people where I'm from are so biased and they have such a certain mindset that nothing I do is really gonna change them. I hope that they would change their mind and try it out. But I don't really think they have. I wish that they would, but... And I've tried to get so many of my friends and like why don't you come spend the weekend with me and see what ETSU is like and they're just like naw, I'll just stay here. Wow Yeah It's kinda sad that they're not willing to see what else is out there.

Interviewer: Let's change gears a little bit and turn this around. Say for instance I was a junior or senior at the high school you went to and you knew that I wanted to go to college, I'm a first-generation student, just like you what would you tell me?

Respondent: I would um, I would probably say something along the lines of how good it is to see what else is out there and I would also try to find out what you're interested in so I could find out more about the programs we have here and tell you about it cause I'm a huge ETSU supporter and like everybody I talk to, every time I go home you need to come to ETSU you need to check it out. It may not be for you but you need to check it out anyways. Um, I don't know

Interviewer: Do you think ETSU could do a better job of reaching out to communities like Turtletown?

Respondent: I think they could because I had to do a lot of digging actually to find ETSU because most of our only options that they give us that they actually talk to us about in my high school are UTK, UTC, Cleveland State and that's pretty much it. And so I went on the web I went to college fairs like oh this ETSU that looks really good. But I had to dig to find it.

Interviewer: Now what made you choose ETSU over say UT Knoxville or Chattanooga?

Respondent: The price. The price is one of the big things. Cause my family, like I said we're so poor, like its ridicules. Um, the price was a big thing and I liked the location and I like that it's just right for me just the right amount of space between home and here. Um and I really liked the pre med program that's why I originally came here but I changed and I love the psychology program even more. Um I just loved everything about it. It was just.. It was love at first sight. I had seen so many college brochures and I was actually at the college fair and somehow missed the ETSU booth and um somebody else had been like hey look at this and I was like this is it. That's great this is for me.

Interviewer: What was it in that brochure that you saw first that kinda clicked for you?

Respondent: Actually the picture on the outside was of mountains and I was like this reminds me of home but I kept flipping through it and was like ok they have all this other stuff too so its home plus this other stuff it's the best of both worlds.

Interviewer: So maybe we need to be a little more we need to get out there when we see those students walking by we need to say hey come here, come here, look.

Respondent: Yeah and I know a lot of colleges, well not a lot, but there's a couple that actually come to our school and set up in the cafeteria and do a booth. ETSU doesn't do that. And I really wish they would. Cause I think a lot of people would come to ETSU if they knew about it. Because That will be part of my recommendations Um cause actually the graduating class this year had a lot of um friends in that class. And I think I've talked three or four of them into actually coming up here. Yeah I talked I was like you should come visit and check it out and they did and loved it. And so they're coming in the Fall. And every time I go home I take catalogues from the Arc you know over in the Culp and brochures. I'm like look, look, we may have to hire you when you graduate.

Interviewer: What are the things you're telling people about ETSU?

Respondent: Well, one of the huge things because everybody so poor where I'm from is the cost. I mean it's great, so wonderful the price here. And there's so many different programs that ETSU offers that some of the colleges closer to home don't and I try to find whatever the person is interested in. and I'll flip to that page and look they have a great program, you can do this, this and this. I'm a pretty big ETSU advocate.

Interviewer: That's great, I am too. I love ETSU. My brothers and sisters went to school here and when I started teaching here my elder sister said "You know ETSU is like a second home for us." And I said "you know, that's right".

Respondent: Yeah, See when I go home I call this home now. I don't call home home anymore. This is home now. This is my home. This is where I belong. That's great! And like I said I'm probably going to permantely relocate up here. Maybe cause I'm actually an RA resident advisor in Governor's Hall. And like I just wanted to get so involved cause I love ETSU so much and like I wanna get involved, I wanna do everything I can. So I think after undergrad I'm gonna get an apartment up here.

Interviewer: Well cool we need people like you here. Do you think college has changed you?

Respondent: Yes, for the better definitely. It's opened my eyes to a lot more things and given me a lot more opportunities. For example, me and Greg next summer we're going to Thailand on an elephant conservation project with the school, yeah. I'm very excited about that. And I joined the invisible children club I'm gonna go to Uganda soon and try to raise some money for the child soldiers, try to liberate them. It's just opened my eyes to so many things that I didn't know were out there that I could do to become more pro-active.

Interviewer: Would you have had these opportunities in Turtletown, if you had gone to the community college?

Respondent: No if I had chosen to go to the community college I'd still be living at home, I'd still be working, which when I go home this summer I work two jobs. I'm a certified pharmacy technician; I work at two pharmacies all summer long, ten hours a day six days a week. I'd still be doing that plus trying to balance school. I wouldn't have time for

anything. And no, there's no opportunities, there's no outreach programs or anything. The biggest outreach program we have is Relay for Life. And people don't even come to that. It makes me really sad.

Interviewer: You're very involved from what you're telling me. You seem to get very involved in community programs.

Respondent: Yeah I am a children and animal lover and I want I'd love for there to be world peace and I'd love for everybody to have the same opportunities that I have. And I mean that's probably my life's goal. Is to visit as many places as I can and make as big of difference as I can.

Interviewer: You need to check out the Carter Center in Atlanta because they do a lot of the work that you're talking about...Really? And there is an elephant retirement home in Tennessee. Are you kidding me? Let me see if I can remember... Hohenwald, it's in West Tennessee I'm going. And they take circus elephants that have gotten too old. They're all female, they only take females. I wonder why? I guess older males get aggressive. So they only have the females and I actually had a class, a 1010 class, a couple of years ago do research on it and communicate with them.

Respondent: I'm going to the zoo this Sunday. I'm a huge animal lover. And I'm going to start volunteering at the animal shelter soon. And I just love animals anything with animals and children I'm in.

Interviewer: Now have you heard about our service learning classes? No Check those out – Service Learning, Sherry Cohen would be the person to work with. That would be an excellent class for you because in Service Learning you're doing service for the community as part of your work in the class. So you do so many hours of service to the community and I know one of them is volunteering at the humane society. I know they do that as one of them. But in the class there are things you talk about that I'm betting would be of very much interest to you because they talk about issues related to diversity and issues of world culture and our connection and so forth. It's a really good class. It's at the freshman level, I think. But anyone can take it, so check that out.

Respondent: I will for sure Yeah, like I said my first day when I saw all these people speaking different languages and looking different and wearing different clothes, I almost cried. I was like this is the most beautiful thing I've seen in my life and I'm so excited that I'm here.

Interviewer: So you would say then that college, that university life, is transformational.

Respondent: Definitely. For the better.

Interviewer: So based on the information you've given me, I sense that you feel very positive about your desire, your choice to come to college.

Respondent: Oh, yes I don't regret it. There's never a day when I regret it. There's some days I feel bad I'm like my family needs me you know I should be at home helping them, but, but I see the bigger picture. One day, I'll be able to help them now. But one day I'm gonna be able to do so many things for em.

Interviewer: Part of what makes this works is the change that you've experienced. Do you think that's important? Is that something that's even more important for the people of Appalachia to experience?

Respondent: Yeah I think so because change is inevitable. You may as well accept it and embrace it. And I'm so glad that I did. Cause I could be back home being (inaudible) up on the mountain. Helping Michael distill the moonshine. Having babies, but (laughing) I think that, I mean I really value my culture, my southern Appalachian heritage. I really do. But there's more out there then just you know my the way I grew up, there's a lot more out there and I think that southern Appalachians , not they need to realize it but they need to be more exposed to what else is out there. I'm not trying to persuade them but there are better things. But let them know there are other ways and there are other things.

Interviewer: So if you could maybe list five or six tings that for you typify southern Appalachian culture. What would those things be?

Respondent: Strong sense of family unity, A lot of kinda old fashioned values, I don't know if it's like this in all southern Appalachian, but where I'm from women are very inferior to men. Religion is a big thing.

Interviewer: What about education?

Respondent: Sadly, not a very good education, not an optimal education, which is really sad. And also financial situations.

Interviewer: I've heard it said that education is the key to opening up a whole new world.

Respondent: It really is. I would agree with that 100%. After I get my PhD I'll probably find I will come up with some reason to keep going to school, I know I will. (laughing) I will find a reason. Well that's great. I'm actually thinking about, what I'm really considering is getting my PhD and becoming a professor here. That would be great. In the Psychology department. I've really been giving that a lot of thought. I think I'd really love to do that. There are things that you could do there are other things you could do as well. Because being a professor I mean it's a pretty flexible thing you know I could do my clinical you know stuff. And I could be a professor. Absolutely and I could do my elephant conservation. Absolutely, and you could also be part of our outreach. To communities like...Oh and I definitely would. I think that's probably one of the things we need to be better at. I would agree. I love ETSU and I love everything about it but I think if the outreach was more. I don't know if it needs to be more funded or more participation or whatever it is. Maybe we need to think more, we need to think more where we go when we do outreach. Maybe we need to think about those smaller

communities Cause I mean you know there's like Ok let's go visit the kids in Knoxville, let's go visit the kids in Chattanooga. What about Turtletown. We're over here too. We need help too. Absolutely.

Interviewer: Well this has given me lots of good ideas. Thank you so much.

Respondent: Oh you're more than welcome. If it were me I'd go get my Google map and I would pick the most random places I've never heard of and those would be the places I would go. For sure. Cause chances are the kids in those big cities already know about all the colleges. Right But like at my house, we don't even have internet. Oh really No, I have to go out to town to use the internet when I'm at home. We don't have cell phone reception.

Interviewer: And you know I see on TV usually it's some kind of horror movie.

Respondent: Yeah like a wrong turn (laughing) And I'm like you know that's what its I hate that people get that perception. Nobody wants to come visit us, cause they're afraid we're gonna eat them or something. (laughing) But, I mean it looks exactly the same the people, some of the people are a little scary. I'm not gonna lie, there are some scary people, and a lot of them are in my family. (laughing) But yeah, but I've had a lot of people judge me, make assumptions about me because of where I'm in, I have a really thick accent. And just from knowing where I'm from and how poor. They make judgments about me that I'm going to be raciest, that I'm going to be conservative and all this. Til they get to know me then they're like wow, are there more people like you from where you're from. I'm like there's a few. It's just hard to find them.

Interviewer: What do you think makes the difference? Why were different than the majority of the people around you?

Respondent: My mom. She always taught me that we aren't any different from anybody, we're not just because we're poor and you know we struggle we're not inferior to anybody. We're not better than anybody. And that I need to be accepting and open to everything cause there's no one right way, you know. Definitely, my mom. She's my hero. I know everybody says that but she really is something else.

Interviewer: Well that's great. Well, you need to get her up here.

Respondent: Yeah. I want her to move, she wants to move up here. Just we don't have the financial ability to do that yet, yet. It's gonna happen. It will happen.

Interviewer: Has she been up here to visit?

Respondent: Yeah, she comes up to visit, sometimes. She can't, she can't stay very long cause she has to work all the time. My sister is a junior in high school. I'm trying to talk her into coming up here. But she's wanting to do more technical things. I'm like well you know Northeast State Tech's just right down the road. That's right. That's right. And



there's stuff here on campus as well. Keep working. Oh I am. I'm not going to give up. I'm gonna get everybody up here. (laughing) That's great.

Interviewer: Ok well, I think that concludes what we're doing. Do you have any other comments that you'd like to add or anything, any other ideas, anything you'd like to clarify?

Respondent: I don't think so.

### **Email Follow-up**

Interviewer: Janet, did you use computer technology much before coming to ETSU?

Respondent: No. We didn't have one at home, and the ones at school were in bad shape. I remember trying to write a paper on one, but it was easier to use a typewriter.

Interviewer: What about now?

Respondent: Huge difference! I had to learn how to use computers from the first day. My learning curve was steep. I'm okay now, though. I feel more comfortable using computers. I'm saving up to buy my own laptop. For now, I use the computer labs on campus.

Interviewer: tell me about your learning curve.

Respondent: One of my professors said we could use the library online. I didn't understand what he meant. I didn't ask either. I just went to the library and watched the people using computers, but I didn't know what they were doing. I felt dumb, but I learned it on my own. I didn't have to ask for help.

Interviewer: Would you encourage other first-generation students to follow your lead?

Respondent: LOL. No. I did it the hard way.

**Bob**

Interviewer: Alright, so we're ready to go. To get started. Why don't you tell me where you're from, how long you've been in school, your major, minor, etc.

Respondent: I'm from Johnson City. I've lived here all my life unfortunately. [laughter] I live in Elizabethton now. This is my first year at college. My major's English, and I'm minoring in film studies.

Interviewer: Are you a first-generation student.

Respondent: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Okay, Bob, I want you to think back to your first day on campus. What was it like? What kind of emotional reactions did you have to the first day?

Respondent: Oh, totally nerve-wracking. Because I was so not ready. ETSU is like its own little city, and everyone is so intense the first day. I didn't know where I was going, so I was just hoping I'd find the right place and all. And like everyone has this perception of college as being completely impossible when they are in high school, so I was kind of scared and stuff.

Interviewer: Let's go with that. Tell me what you learned about college while you were in HS.

Respondent: What I learned in HS about college, well, I mean like, teachers in HS make it sound like, you know, you will be in classes, like, sixteen hours a day. You won't have any free time to do anything or have time to work or anything. Everything's gonna be like you're in a box in college.

Interviewer: That's kind of scary.

Respondent: Yeah. They kind of intimidate you about college. So it's no wonder TN has a low graduation rate. [laughter]

Interviewer: So, did your high school teachers tell you what to expect from professors?

Respondent: Um, not really. They just told me I'd be a good student cause I guess they thought I was responsible.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, so tell me about what was it like when you sat down in that very first course.

Respondent: Well, it was an English course, and I was really nervous because I was making sure my name was on the roll because I was afraid of being purged, which I'd never heard of before college. So after my name was called, I was kind of relaxed for 55 minutes, then I was, like, well I might as well get lost trying to go to some other course. Now that I look

back on it, I guess I expected it to be more intense and all, which is how people portray it and think about it in their minds from teachers. In an way, it was just like high school, but you had more independence, more responsible for your own actions.

Interviewer: Now, you said you had things in your mind about what to expect. Some of that probably came from HS and what your teachers told you, but I was wondering if you picked up some of that from films or television. Were there other sources that gave you views of college?

Respondent: Oh yeah. That's how movies represent that. Like, for instance, a random movie called *Dead Man on Campus*, which is about partying and getting by and such. And then like every TV show nowadays has more about sex and scandal in college. About throwing caution to the wind and doing whatever you feel like doing.

Interviewer: Did you kind of think that might be what it would be like?

Respondent: Yeah, I thought it would be more adult oriented. More like "you're finally going into the world" kind of thing, which is also a little scary if you think about it.

Interviewer: So, what was it like when you got here? Was it a relief?

Respondent: Yeah, it was. It was a big relief to find that college isn't so much like what you see in the movies and on TV. At the same time, it sort of grounded me, it's all up to me. It's all on me to do well instead of depending on someone to help me. It's basically my responsibility to get an education for myself.

Interviewer: Which can also be kind of scary.

Respondent: Yeah, and it's kind of more of a challenge, because my philosophy about college is if you go to class and do your work, you'll be successful, I think. I mean I haven't missed one class since I started here.

Interviewer: What about your family and friends?

Respondent: Oh, yeah. My family absolutely wanted me to come to college, because they were high school graduates only and they wanted me to do better. I'm an only child, so they really wanted me to have a better life than they had and a better education was the best route to do that.

Interviewer: Did your parents talk to you about college?

Respondent: They just said to do your best and try everything you can. Don't take it for granted. It kinda grounds you, too, when you're sitting there in the classroom and there's a 30 year old sitting there with you. I'm blessed to have a chance actually to go right from high school to college instead of waiting like some of my friends.

Interviewer: What about your friends from high school?

Respondent: They were supportive as well, and I was supportive of them. I'd say that of about 120 graduates, I can think of maybe 20 or so that went on to college. I don't know what the other people are doing.

Interviewer: Um how many of them came here to ETSU?

Respondent: Well, I'd say about 12 or 15 of them.

Interviewer: Do you keep in touch with them?

Respondent: Um, yeah. Like in my US History class. I have about five of my HS friends in that class. We sit in different sections of the room, but I talk to them when I get a chance.

Interviewer: Now, let's see, you went to Happy Valley, is that right?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How familiar were you with ETSU?

Respondent: I was really familiar with ETSU. I have relatives who work here. I've had cousins and uncles who have graduated from ETSU. So I was pretty well geared to ETSU.

Interviewer: Was ETSU your first choice?

Respondent: No, not my first choice. You know how it is. When you're in high school you think about going to Harvard or Yale or something like that. For me, I wanted to go to Memphis, but I figured it was going to be so difficult to move and leave my family, and ETSU is a rising school, so it made sense to me to go here when I thought about it.

Interviewer: What were some of the reasons you ended up choosing ETSU?

Respondent: Well, uh, like I said, I had some cousins and uncles who went there before and got a very good education and it's just ten or fifteen minutes away from my home, so it's easy for commuting. It was just very convenient. I didn't know much about the English department, but I figured it would have a good liberal arts program.

Interviewer: Did you know that you wanted to be an English major?

Respondent: Oh, yeah, from the start.

Interviewer: Okay, so you did well in your English classes in HS?

Respondent: Yes. I loved them.

Interviewer: Okay, so you came to school knowing what you wanted to do. Is that correct?

Respondent: Yeah, I knew I wanted to write screenplays or movie reviews, either one.

Interviewer: That's great, Bob. So, I have another question that has come up in other interviews for people who grew up close to ETSU. Did you any of the tours of ETSU?

Respondent: Um, no. I had a tour of Northeast, but i never had a chance to get a tour of ETSU. I came to Preview, but that's like the biggest waste of time. The whole point of that is to meet new people, but I'll kinda just talk to anybody. I have a lot of friends in the English department, so I don't have a problem with meeting people.

Interviewer: If you could redo Preview, how would you do that?

Respondent: I'd do it more like Orientation and divide people up by their major, because when you meet people with your same interests, it's a lot easier to get along and meet new people. What they do in Preview is put you in random groups. I had Psychology majors with me in my group. You can't really connect that way. Especially with three days. You don't really get a chance to talk about that much.

Interviewer: When you were doing that, did you get to meet any professors?

Respondent: Uuh, I didn't get a chance. The only people that I met from Orientation were Dr. Slagle and Dr. O'Donnell and Deanna, of course.

Interviewer: Imagine that I am a high school senior, and I wanted to know more about college. What would you tell me? What kind of advice would you give me about going to college?

Respondent: You sound like my friends. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Okay, so I'm a potential first-generation student, and I'm not quite sure I want to go to college. Tell me what I need to know.

Respondent: College is alot more fast paced. More responsibility on you. You have to put in more effort. In high school you can easily get by, but in college you have to assert yourself. You have to study alot more. I remember my first test. I didn't study, and I got a 75. But it was psychology, so... It's about, you know, if you get a chance to go to college, it's worth it, you know. I mean every job nowadays is requiring college degrees, especially now in this time, jobs are so scarce.

Respondent: Well, I could say that my mom and dad didn't go to college, but they got good jobs.

Respondent: Well, that was then. They got jobs then. It's a completely different playing field now. My dad's a plumber, and he barely graduated high school. There's more qualifications now. And college is about getting that degree and getting the grades, but

it's more about opening your mind to other things. I want to get a grade in the class, but I want to learn something, too. Yeah, like, I'm an English major, and some of the English things bore me to death, but sociology and psychology intrigue me, but English is what I love.

Interviewer: Well, let's go with that a little bit. Why is it important that a college education open your mind to other things?

Respondent: Well, if you look at people in Tennessee, they're more close-minded, and I'm not trying to say anything bad about past generations, but most of them are not college educated. And, you know, it's good, like in Argument and Debate, you have to have your own life experience, but at the same time you can't put people's views down. It's very hard in Tennessee where everyone is very conservative to be kind of open-minded and a liberal person, I suppose.

Interviewer: SO, you would say that the future will require that you have the experiences that college gives you.

Respondent: You're gonna need the experience to come up with new ideas, because God knows we're gonna need them in the future, of course. I mean, everyone says that we're kind of the wasted generation because we came out in the technological era, but I think we can't mess it up anymore than the past. I mean everyone, like the bail out, they said One trillion dollars for a bail out.

Interviewer: That leads me in a slightly different direction. Do you feel that there is a college culture that exists?

Respondent: I don't necessarily think there's a college culture, but it's the people you meet, especially in your major, and especially with the federal work study, which allows me to work in the English department, I get to meet new people. I don't think it's really the culture, because most people will tell you that the culture is drinking and bar hopping and stuff. I'm more about meeting people with a similar interest, you know. I guess that's culture to me. Like, I come from Happy Valley, you know, and everyone's a Republican there, but I'm kinda like a liberal type person, not Democrat or Republican, but it was just a relief to find people who shared my views. I mean like the English department is really liberal, and it's just interesting to get to talk to people there, and it's so interesting to talk to people who have a knowledge of movies and a passion for movie scores like I did. People ask what I'm listening to, and I say movie scores and they say, what's that? And when I listen to classical music, people say "really?" [laughter] Why don't you listen to rap. You can't understand them, though. I can't.

Interviewer: So do you feel that college has changed you?

Respondent: I think it has changed me. It's made me, I think it's made me more independent. I know I still live at home, but that's for financial reasons. I think it's made me, you know, I think the first year at college, you know, you aren't really an adult until after your first

year cause you finally get that experience behind you, succeed and be successful.

Interviewer: Then do you foresee that college is going to change you or transform you?

Respondent: I think it's going to make me more open, even more than I am now, to certain ideas, you know, beyond the realm of religion or whatever, just, you know, be open minded, you know, to every teacher and everybody's point of view. I think you have to respect everyone's point of view and not many people do that. For years I hated Michael Moore (the director), but I didn't know why. I was ultra conservative because of other people in school and teachers. My parents weren't that political. They watch Fox News too much.

Interviewer: Are you glad that you made the choice to come to ETSU?

Respondent: I really am, I really like it here, like I decided to come here basically for convenience, but it's actually turned out to be good. Every teacher I've had I've enjoyed. Every class I've had I've enjoyed, besides public speaking, but [laughter], but I've enjoyed everything I've done so far. It's just an interesting experience, because you wait your whole life. In high school you're like, I can't wait for my life to start, and you're like, wow, I'm in it. I'm actually out in the world. Technically, I'm training to be something.

Interviewer: And college gives you that experience?

Respondent: College gives you the experience and the motivation to succeed, I think.

Interviewer: Well, it sounds like you'd be an excellent spokesperson for ETSU, or for any college for that matter.

Interviewer: Being a first-generation student, does it make college any more special for you?

Respondent: Yes. Being a first-generation student, I have an opportunity that not many people get, but at the same time, um, I just really want to succeed. And it gives you motivation. You know, I've always viewed it from the point that living in East TN, the world thinks that you can't amount to anything, and I use that as motivation to surprise people.

Interviewer: That's that whole Appalachian stereotype.

Respondent: You can't do anything unless you want to be a bad country singer from ETSU.

Interviewer: Have you dealt with any Appalachian stereotypes?

Respondent: Oh yeah, well, of course the accent and everything. I think, like, I think people think about Tennessee or Appalachian people as a whole, you know it's the trailer park, mullet type people that are unsophisticated that are, you know, that can't achieve anything at all. They're just blue collar people. I mean, my mom's blue collar, well she's supervisor at a plant, but she's more articulate than some of the professors I've met. I think it's just how your mind develops through your experiences. I hate the stereotype of being "poor,

white trash” that gets portrayed on television and in the movies. Not everyone in Appalachia is poor, white, or trashy. I hate it.

Interviewer: Bob, if you had to choose one identifier, would you refer to yourself as Southern or Appalachian?

Respondent: I always use Southern. I think most people around here identify with Southern more than Appalachian. It could just be me, but I think that’s how most people describe themselves. But, I know I’m Appalachian too, and that’s okay.

Interviewer: So for you, then, being Southern and Appalachian in higher ed. that's a good fit?

Respondent: Yes. I’m comfortable with who I am. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Well, Bob, I think that’s all we have time for today. Is there anything else you’d like to add before we finish?

Respondent: Nope. Thanks for the interview. I enjoyed it.

Interviewer: Thank you, Bob.



## Patrick

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about yourself, Patrick.

Respondent: Well, I'm from Rogersville. My major is finance, and I want to focus on investment banking.

Interviewer: How long have you been in college?

Respondent: This is my second year. I'm a sophomore.

Interviewer: What lead you to choose ETSU?

Respondent: Price. I was actually at Maryville College to play basketball but I could not afford the tuition it's like \$35,000 a year. So I had to transfer here cause it's something I could afford to pay for. And it's only a few hours away from home so it's convenient. It keeps my mother happy.

Interviewer: Do you live on campus or do you live in Johnson City?

Respondent: Yea, I have a house right across from campus.

Interviewer: How often do you go back to Rogersville?

Respondent: Um, on like a bi-weekly or monthly basis usually. About once every few weeks.

Interviewer: At home do you have brothers and sisters?

Respondent: I have two sisters, one is 17 and the other one is 15.

Interviewer: And is it just your mom at home?

Respondent: My mother and father.

Interviewer: Are your sisters planning on going to college?

Respondent: Yeah as far as well my oldest one is. And the other one wants to be a cosmetologist or something.

Interviewer: Other than you, what about your parents, aunts, uncles... do they have any type of background in college? Did they go to college?

Respondent: Neither my parents went to college. My mom, she went to cosmetology school, that's not college, then my aunts and uncles went to work from Detroit, from the Detroit area so they went to work for the big three automakers. And then one of my uncles went to he took management classes. It wasn't at like a college it was at a training type thing

and then he just worked ground up from like the hotel. So he didn't go to college he took a few classes you know like um companies will send you to their own management school whatever, that's what he did. That's about the extent of it.

Interviewer: Now did you grow up in Rogersville or did you move there?

Respondent: I've lived there all my life.

Interviewer: Tell me about the kind of support that you got, what was your parent's reaction when you told them that you were going to go to college?

Respondent: My mom said you know you definitely need to go. My dad said I'd rather you stay here and work with me.

Interviewer: What does your father do?

Respondent: He owns a carpet cleaning business. I guess I was just kinda supposed to take over his business like its very cliché but that's basically how it was.

Interviewer: You still get good strong support from your mom?

Respondent: Uh-huh

Interviewer: Is your father coming around to the idea?

Respondent: Yeah, he's just accepting that I'm going to be here whether he likes it or not.

Interviewer: What about your sisters? How do they feel about you being in college? Respondent: They're proud of me. They like it.

Interviewer: You went to Maryville first? When did you transfer here to ETSU?

Respondent: Last semester, Fall 08.

Interviewer: Think back to your first day of college at Maryville. Was that right out of high school that you went to Maryville?

Respondent: Actually I went here first for part of a semester and then I transferred there. So I came back to ETSU.

Interviewer: Well think back to your first day of college and the classes that you took and the people that you met, the professors that you met. Tell me what that was like.

Respondent: It was kind of like; it was like starting high school all over again. Not knowing anybody, looking for people to know but it's kinda an overwhelming feeling but then at

the same time it was like you know this is something that I'm going to be glad I did in a couple of years.

Interviewer: What about navigating around on campus? How did that compare to being in high school?

Respondent: It was a lot harder. Like I walked three, I can remember three times that I walked into the wrong prob and stats class and sat there and I didn't know it was the wrong class till like afterwards when he assigned roll and my name wasn't on there and I found out I was suppose to be in the room across the hall. Like that happened three times.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to sort of get used to the schedule, and just the routine of college?

Respondent: It took about, it took me about a week, like the first week of classes and everything to get used to the times and everything.

Interviewer: Did you participate in any of the activities that went on prior to the semester starting, the preview?

Respondent: I went to preview.

Interviewer: What did you think of that?

Respondent: Uh, I like, I like the meeting the people and stuff but then like how they did previews they had it so structured and they made you do certain things. Like I'm a more free willed type person they made us go to all these activities and made us do these things. It wasn't enjoyable. You know like I enjoy the meeting the people and stuff like that but like all the other stuff they made you go to I felt like I was being forced to do something especially since I'm coming to college and doing my own thing and now more people are forcing me to do more you know....does that make sense?

Interviewer: What were some of the things that they forced you to do that you didn't care for?

Respondent: We had to go to these like seminars about like first year seminars like um, how to study, how to and I can understand making you go to that but or encouraging you to go to that but not making you go to it you know how to study, how to do this, how to find your classes, how to talk to your professors, how to ask questions, stuff like that.

Interviewer: After you did it, did you find that any of that helped you when you were starting that first week or so of class?

Respondent: Um, talking to the professors. One helped a little bit because um they told us you know to talk to your professors and all that and I didn't think that professors really talk to students in the first place. So that was helpful.

Interviewer: What kinds of images did you have in your mind of professors? What were you thinking about before you got here maybe during that preview week or something? What was going on in your mind as far as the kind of people that you would be encountering with regard to your professors?

Respondent: I expected to meet two kinds of professors. The first kind would be like the distant unapproachable professors in the big classes and then like I thought there'd be a couple of classes I'd have there'd be like small, conversational, get-to-know type professors.

Interviewer: Did that work out?

Respondent: Yeah, a mixture of both.

Interviewer: What were your most, well tell me first what kind of classes did you have when you first started?

Respondent: I had chemistry and there was like 150 people in there and I had problem stats there was about 30 people in there. I had honors Russian Literature and there was only like 12 people in there and that was like my favorite class. And it was a difficult class but it was like one of those close conversational classes and I enjoyed that and um speech and I can't remember my other one.

Interviewer: So you definitely enjoyed the smaller conversational classes. I guess what I'm hearing is you seem to prefer a more conversational, more informal approach to education anyway.

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Prior to coming to college, were there any television shows, any movies things that you saw that you watched that might have influenced what you thought about college before you got here?

Respondent: More what influenced what I thought about college was my friends cause I, all my friends are older. Growing up I didn't watch, I know it sounds kinda ridiculous, but I didn't really watch TV that much. I hardly ever watched movies so especially not movies about college and stuff but like what my friends told me about college basically perceptions I grew.

Interviewer: And what were some of the things they told you?

Respondent: My friends weren't "A" students by no means so they would talk to me about not having to go to class you know like they would talk about the informal teachers saying how... They didn't like that because they wanted the classes where there's 300 people and you didn't have to go to class and you just did your tests. And that's what they talked about is enjoying themselves in classes. It's probably not the students who should be in college anyway.

Interviewer: Imagine that I'm a high school junior or senior, I'm first-generation and I'm thinking about coming to ETSU but I'm not sure how would you persuade me to come to ETSU as a first-generation student?

Respondent: I would say that ETSU's is a great place to come first of all if you're first-generation it seems to me that most first-generation people aren't going to get to much financial support from their family you know because for what ever reason. So first of all its one of the cheapest four year schools in the country and then like the area around here is nice most of the people are friendly it doesn't have the big city loneliness feel to it that you get from UT or Memphis for example or Tennessee Tech. And then I've also say that living on campus first year would be a good idea cause it keeps you in line it keeps you going to classes and stuff whereas if you're living in an apartment or all that you got the parties and all this other stuff to kinda keep you from going to classes.

Interviewer: What about students who say well, I'm going to live with my parents I don't want to live on campus. Would you maybe try to persuade them to go ahead and live on campus?

Respondent: Definitely because moving away from your parents it helps you grow up a little bit helps you mature a little bit and I guess the main thing is that when you're living at home with you're parents it's not going to teach you to be as independent when you're in college you have to study by yourself. You're not going to have your parents forcing you to do everything all the time. And so you have to get used to that eventually and as a freshman since most of your classes are core classes that everybody has to have it'd be easier to get used to that when you're taking your easier classes than it would be when you're taking stuff that's going to be important to your degree and stuff.

Interviewer: Do you find that there are things to do at ETSU beyond just going to class? Are there things that are going to keep students around? For instance a lot of students who live here on campus go home on the weekends or people who drive to campus they'll drive here, go to class, then go back to there cars then go home . Are there things here are there enough things around to keep students here or is that something maybe we could work on?

Respondent: I think that's something that's lacking. I guess and it's easy to make comparisons to UT because they're only about an hour away but you know they have the football games and then you have like the marquee basketball games like the big events they put on and concerts. I can't remember the last time there was a good concert in Johnson City. And that's stuff that keeps you in that area. That we really don't have around here. Like you said everybody leaves once Friday comes. There's nobody on campus. So I guess it doesn't have as much of a personal feel. It takes a lot of the social interaction away too. That I think should make college more enjoyable in the first place.

Interviewer: Do you feel that in the work you've done and the classes you've taken, college has changed you?

Respondent: Uh-huh I really do

Interviewer: In what ways?

Respondent: It's caused me to mature a lot. Made me do what I know I need to do instead of it actually kept me from procrastinating. I know a lot of college students it makes them procrastinate but it makes me do stuff that I probably wouldn't otherwise do. But I know it's for my betterment It's given me a different perspective on a lot of things.

Interviewer: Do you feel then I guess for you college you would say college has helped you mature.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: The Russian Lit course that you took is that the type of thing that would have a big influence on you? Is that the type of course that you feel would expand your mind in ways that you wouldn't get if you were working at Wal-mart?

Respondent: Definitely shows what perspective's about people in other countries but then it all kinda relates back to you because you know while they're in a different country and different time periods speaking a different language they still have the same problems and emotions that we do.

Interviewer: If I were a first-generation college perspective student would you recommend ETSU to me?

Respondent: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: You mentioned some reasons like the town and like down at UT you feel more like a number.

Respondent: Yeah it's got a smaller town feel. It's beautiful country. And again it's cheaper. It really is inexpensive considering.

Interviewer: What about this part of the country? Do you think much about living in Appalachia?

Respondent: Not really. I hear about it, but I don't think much about living in Appalachia.

Interviewer: Are there aspects of Appalachia that are part of your life?

Respondent: Well, living in the country, but that's not necessarily Appalachia. I don't know.

Interviewer: Well, let me ask you this: do you consider yourself Appalachian or Southern?

Respondent: Southern. Definitely.

Interviewer: What about ETSU? Is ETSU an Appalachian school?

Respondent: Not really. There's the country music program, but that's just one small part. No, ETSU doesn't represent any one area of the country. That's the way it should be.

Interviewer: Do you like country music, Patrick?

Respondent: Depends.

Interviewer: On what?

Respondent: I hate hillbilly music, but I love country music singers like Garth Brooks, Keith Urban, or Patty Loveless.

Interviewer: How do you define hillbilly music?

Respondent: You know, music from around here that everyone gets so excited about.

Interviewer: The kind of music that ETSU teaches in its music program?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you feel from your experiences thus far that ETSU's also a place where you can get a good solid education?

Respondent: It's what you put into it. You can take the classes that grow yourself or you can slack off and take the class you have to take. I think it's all what you put into it. So yeah, I guess that answers your question.

Interviewer: Are there any things about ETSU that you just don't care for?

Respondent: I don't like the lack of social activities, lack of football team. Other than that there's really nothing that really stands out.

Interviewer: Well is there anything else that you want to tell me? Anything else about your experiences in college as a first-generation student?

Respondent: I'm glad I'm doing it. I really am. Just because it gives you opportunities that you wouldn't otherwise have. Like a good example is that my roommate was working at TRW factory in Pikeville, his parents wanted him to stay there cause he'd be making really good money but then like they got laid off. They like laid off 200 workers like a month later you know and that just goes to show that if you don't have a little bit of something to fall back on you're kinda gambling with your future. And so it's nice to have options.

Interviewer: The statistics show that if you have a Bachelors degree you will over the length of your career you will earn a million dollars more than the person who doesn't have a degree. And that's a lot of money.

Respondent: That is a lot of money.

Interviewer: So it's definitely worth it.

Interviewer: So based on what you've told me higher ed is a positive thing for you.

Respondent: Definitely

Interviewer: Anything else that you want to add?

Respondent: I can't think of anything

Email Follow-up:

Interviewer: What was your experience with computer technology prior to enrolling at ETSU? Did you use computers in high school to work on research papers or do other work?

Respondent: My high school didn't have many computers that actually worked. I had a computer at home, but I gamed. I didn't do school stuff, except for a few book reports. I didn't expect for college to be so technology oriented. I didn't check my email for the first five weeks of my first semester, and I missed a lot of important stuff. I'm getting better at that stuff, and I'm okay with using computers for papers. I've done a few research papers using the online library stuff.



## Sherry

Interviewer: Sherry, let's begin with a little background information. Where are you from?

Respondent: I'm from Greenville, Tennessee.

Interviewer: Have you lived in Greenville all your life?

Respondent: I've lived there almost 21 years. I've lived in the same spot. It's really close to the border of North Carolina.

Interviewer: What about your parents, Sherry? Tell me about them.

Respondent: Well, my dad went to college for a little while but he decided it wasn't going to be worth it and dropped out during his first semester. So he bought a family owned business and now he makes partials and dentures and crowns for all the dentists in Greenville. And I help him do that. And mom works at a family ran radio station. We own WGRV, WIKQ, and WSMG, our distant family does so. And I'm the first one that's ever went to college, so, I'm experiencing all this for them and everybody else in my family.

Interviewer: Are they pretty excited about you going to college?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. I'm going to be a teacher.

Interviewer: So you're studying education?

Respondent: Uh-huh

Interviewer: what level do you want to teach?

Respondent: High school.

Interviewer: High school and what do you want to teach?

Respondent: English

Interviewer: Oh, ok, high school English, wow.

Respondent: Yep, I substitute and I figured out high schools where I need to be.

Interviewer: Oh ok ok I don't know if I could do it or not. (laughing)

Interviewer: So, Sarah, how long have you been in college?

Respondent: Um, this is my third year.

Interviewer: Well, what I want you to do to get started with this is to think back to your very first day and think about what that was like, what was going through your mind, what you did that day, what kind of classes you attended. Think back, if you can recall, to that very first class that you took, that you sat in, that you walked into. And tell me a little bit about that. What was your first day of college like?

Respondent: It's funny because me and my cousin are three months apart and we scheduled all of our classes together because we were both so scared of college. So we had the exact same classes for a whole semester. And our first one was a keyboarding class and it was in the building that we were both born in. It was in the old Lauklin hospital building in Greenville. So I wasn't scared but I was probably nervous that the classroom had been switched or something. They can move all kinds of computers and put us in different rooms but I wasn't scared. The day was quick. We didn't do anything at Walter State. (laughing)

Interviewer: Now when did you switch here to ETSU?

Respondent: It was this past semester.

Interviewer: In the Fall

Respondent: Uh-huh

Interviewer: We'll come back to this but let's also think about your first day at ETSU.

Respondent: Oh, I was scared.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Respondent: Yeah, I was very nervous. I got to school probably two hours early to find a parking spot because I heard it was horrible to park and I walked for awhile past the mini dome and then I found a closer parking spot on down. So, now I'm good.

Interviewer: What was scary, what in your mind was the scary part?

Respondent: I thought the campus was huge but now it's just like any other college.

Interviewer: What about your classes? Did you have any pre-conceptions about being in a university class as opposed to being in a community college class?

Respondent: I thought they would be auditorium size. I had already looked to how many would be in the class but I still figured I would be in an auditorium somewhere, sometime and that scares me still. (laughing)

Interviewer: What about your professors, did you.....?

Respondent: Last semester I didn't like them. Oh no!

Interviewer: Is there a difference between the people you worked with here and the people you worked with at Walter State?

Respondent: Yeah, the professors at Walter State wanted to get to know you on a one-to-one basis. And these here, well I felt like they didn't care. That they had a lot to do and they didn't care. They didn't go out of their way to help you or last semester they didn't.

Interviewer: So in a way, this is interesting, because you're the first student that I've interviewed who actually started at a community college and then transferred here. So you have two first days to talk about. And that's interesting, that's a lot of good information.

Interviewer: When you were in high school did you take any tours of colleges or..?

Respondent: I actually came up here and took a tour.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Respondent: Um, it was ok. I still didn't think it would be too bad. I didn't think the campus was huge, I thought it was big enough. And then I just decided on the smaller community college setting at home, so I wouldn't have to move away.

Interviewer: Well tell me about that decision. What was that based on?

Respondent: Small classroom sizes, being close to home and being able to take my first semester with my best friend and my cousin. It was a transition, like that was my upper high school and now I'm in college, is what I felt like. I took high school and then I went to an upper level high school and now I'm in college.

Interviewer: Did you know that you wanted to be a teacher when you were at Walter State?

Respondent: The second semester I did.

Interviewer: The second semester?

Respondent: Uh-huh, yea.

Interviewer: What helped you make that decision?

Respondent: I started subbing to make a little extra money. And I decided that, I had thought about it in eighth grade, to be a teacher. I went on the job shadowing. And I did that but I really decided while I was at Walter State that's what I want to do.

Interviewer: Well tell me, what does your family think about this? About you becoming a teacher and you going off to ETSU.

Respondent: They love it. Mom said that's the best job I could have. Me being a teacher.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Respondent: Um, government. (laughing) Ok, having a government job.

Interviewer: I would assume that your family is supportive of you going to college and they think that's a really good thing.

Respondent: Definitely, yea. They've even started my younger sister in the dual enrollment classes. She's in high school. She's doing the Walter State thing right now. To get a step up.

Interviewer: Did your parents talk to you about college when you were in high school and younger? Did they talk about college?

Respondent: I just knew I had to go. That was all there was to it. I had to go. They didn't care what I wanted to be. I just had to go and get a degree. Whether it was associates or I kept on going. I had to get some type of college.....

Interviewer: What did they say about that? Why was that important?

Respondent: Nowadays you have to have college to get a decent job. Not to work in McDonald's or somewhere else, you have to have a little bit of a degree.

Interviewer: So they were pretty much planning on you going?

Respondent: Yea.

Interviewer: What about your friends? Now you mention your cousin you all took classes together. What about other friends from high school? Did they make the choice to go to college?

Respondent: Some did, most didn't. Some got a job out of high school and it was a factory job. Now they're laid off. So they'll go back to college. They've decided to go ahead and go back at 20 or 21.

Interviewer: Do you talk to these people? What was their reaction, the ones who chose not to go to college? What did they say to you?

Respondent: The reason they didn't go was to go ahead and get a job and make money and they thought that was ok and they wanted a break from school. They had been in school all those years and they wanted a break. But I didn't need that break or I wouldn't of went.

Interviewer: What do they say now that you've been in school for what three years, this is your third year. And maybe some of them are looking at being laid off and having to come to school and start?

Respondent: They're going to play catch up now. Cause they're trying to load up to catch up with me and be on the same level cause they're not going to like it at our reunion that I'll graduate and be out of college and they'll just be starting.

Interviewer: Imagine that Brad and I are high school pals, and we were a little bit behind you in school. We're juniors or seniors right now and we're sitting around talking about what you're doing, and what we're thinking about doing. We're not sure if we're going to go to college or not. We are first-generation, we'd be first-generation. We don't have family stories and things and so we aren't really sure weather or not college is for us. What would you say to us?

Respondent: I would tell you all to try the dual enrollment thing and try it out while you're in high school to see if you like it. Cause that's getting your foot in the water a little bit, to test it out. And then I would definitely tell you to at least go a year to get the full feeling of it. To get a little bit done and make sure you like it. Just to get out.

Interviewer: Would you suggest we go to Walter State or come on here?

Respondent: I would suggest Walter State, definitely.

Interviewer: Really?

Respondent: Yea. It's a stepping stone. It helps you if you want to transition instead of just jumping in there.

Interviewer: From your perspective it might be a little scary to ....?

Respondent: Yea, definitely. If I went back and redid this whole process, I would still go to Walter State and then come up here.

Interviewer: What about the whole issue of being the first-generation student? How does that make you feel?

Respondent: It terrifies me because I'm the first one to fill out the FASFA, I was the first one to learn how to pay my bill up here. I stood in line for four hours to pay my bill when nobody told me I could just walk upstairs on the second level and pay it and cut 2000 people or how ever many is in front of me.(laughing) So I learn everything new, its just all new to me. Nobody's there to help me. I just gotta do it myself.

Interviewer: Do you feel proud that you're the first in your family to do this?

Respondent: Yea, and I like the feeling that I'm helping my sister out. Cause she's watching me and she looks up to me so if she wasn't thinking about going to college before, she definitely is now. Because it's not as scary for her. She won't be the first one. She knows my stories and it's not bad.

Interviewer: And it really isn't, is it? After you get used to it and you get into the rhythm of it.

Respondent: I don't like the whole semester switch thing. I like having a professor for a year. I would like Tusculum where they do a longer period of time with a professor. It's like building their relationships.

Interviewer: The advice that you would give me about my freshman year would have to do with the little things like the financial aid situation, which that's a biggie. Are there some other things that you would tell me to expect for my freshman year?

Respondent: Uh, I don't know. I would definitely tell you to search high and low for scholarships and other than that expect some big bills for your books. (laughing) Yeah, that's true.

Interviewer: What would you tell me about my professors?

Respondent: I would tell you definitely to sit near the front of class and try to make yourself known to them because, especially if you come to ETSU, you kinda blend in with everybody. So, make yourself known to them. Maybe stop by their office and say hey, my name is such and such. Just wanted to let you know. I would definitely tell them to get to know their professor.

Interviewer: Now, I might counter that and say well, I'm kinda shy. I would be sort of scared to do that. What would you say?

Respondent: Um, maybe find somebody in class and go with them. Cause I'm shy but I definitely try to do that. Try to get to know my professors. Try to go to their office at least once and talk to them about anything. It doesn't matter if it's a paper or whatever cause I want them to know that I care.

Interviewer: Now tell me about, and we can do a comparison with Walter State and ETSU or we can just do ETSU, tell me about college culture. Is there a college culture that exists outside the college classroom? Do you live on campus? NO when you come to school at ETSU do you do other things on campus other than your classes?

Respondent: No, I don't. I have no idea what's going on at campus cause I'm in the one building and I go home. I would if I stayed on campus. I would probably do more. But maybe not, because it's hard for me to find people I get along with and can really buddy up to, quickly. Four years is a quick time for me to make a really good friend. On top of that, I don't have time for cultural activities unless I have to do something for class. I work twenty hours a week and carry 15 hours here

Interviewer: Have you done things on campus for extra credit?

Respondent: Yep. One of my professors gave extra credit for going to one of the bluegrass concerts. It was great. I did enjoy that very much.

Interviewer: Do you tend to like bluegrass and country music?

Respondent: Absolutely.

Interviewer: What about your Appalachian heritage? Does that play into your status as a college student?

Respondent: Hmm. I hadn't really thought about it. I don't think much about Appalachia, even though that's where I live. [laughter]. I guess it's just part of who I am but it's not something I think about much.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself Appalachian? Or do you use some other term to describe yourself.

Respondent: Oh, I use Southern more than Appalachian. Appalachia means poor dirt farmers. That's not my life. Southern is better.

Interviewer: How about your family and friends? Are there things about them that you would consider Appalachian?

Respondent: My neighbor has a Confederate flag hanging outside his house. I guess that's sort of what you're talking about. It's sort of hick or country red neck, I guess.

Interviewer: Wouldn't that be more of a Southern thing to do?

Respondent: I guess it would. [laughter]. I guess maybe Southern and Appalachian are similar that way. But I still think of Appalachia as poverty.

Interviewer: Could you expand on that?

Respondent: Well, it's like the pictures I've seen and some of the people who live near me. They are dirt poor and don't seem interested in doing anything better with their lives.

Interviewer: What do you think about those images?

Respondent: Some of them are real because I see them. There are many stereotypes toward people from this region. Many times I see that people from other regions consider people from Appalachia to be ignorant or incapable. They are quick to judge a geographical region without considering the facts.

Interviewer: How do you react to the stereotypes?

Respondent: I hate them because stereotypes reflect on all of us.

Interviewer: Well, what about other aspects of Appalachian life? Like food?

Respondent: Soup beans and cornbread, I guess. [laughter]. I don't really care for them, though. We don't eat that kind of food. I like real food, like hamburgers and pizza. I don't go in for that country food stuff, except that I do love fried chicken.

Interviewer: What area of the country do you define as Appalachia?

Respondent: Like West Virginia and Kentucky?

Interviewer: How about here in East Tennessee?

Respondent: Not as much. As far as I'm concerned, Appalachia ends at Virginia. It doesn't really extend here. We didn't study Appalachia in school. It's sort of embarrassing to think about really.

Interviewer: Do you think the university might have had an impact on that change?

Respondent: Maybe so.

Interviewer: Okay, let's change gears a bit. Let's go back to our discussion of your work at the university.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier something about attending a concert on campus. How did you learn about that concert?

Respondent: My professor told me.

Interviewer: What about other events on campus? Are you familiar with other events on campus?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How do you get that information?

Respondent: The emails help a lot. I'll check them and read what's happening at ETSU this month or this week. My cousin lives up here so he tells me a lot like he went to the hypnotist and I didn't know about it. (inaudible) He fills me in on stuff that I would want to know about.

Interviewer: So having connections works?



Respondent: Yea. And I hang out with people that I've had class with. And go and do things around here with them.

Interviewer: What are some of the things you do around ETSU?

Respondent: I don't know. I go to, I went to some of the storytellings last semester for my Folklore class. And that was for class conduct, but that was after school so that was an extra thing that I did. And I go watch the movies that they show a lot. They show some movies I'm interested in. That's about it, really.

Interviewer: Did you enjoy the storytelling?

Respondent: Uh-huh

Interviewer: What was that like?

Respondent: It was fun. I really liked it. Everybody seemed to enjoy it.

Interviewer: Do you remember what kind of stories they told?

Respondent: No (laughing) They were folklore, that's all I know.

Interviewer: What kind of movies do they show?

Respondent: They showed something about a panda one time. I skipped it but, uh. They usually show some of the more viewed movies, like something that college kids would be interested in but the panda thing, I don't know if anybody went to it or not.

Interviewer: Before you went to college, were there any movies or television shows that you saw that portrayed college life in a certain way that maybe had an impact on what you were thinking about college?

Respondent: American Pie (laughing)

Interviewer: Ok talk about that.

Respondent: Um, they showed it as a big party. Which I knew parties happen, definitely more at ETSU than they do at Walter State because they have buildings on campus where you can stay. But um, that's how I imagined it up here. Walter State, I thought you just go to class, you go home there's nothing else you do there. But it was a big crazy party, up here

Interviewer: What did you find when you came here?

Respondent: You definitely know who goes to parties the night before because they come in their pajamas or (laughing) Like this morning there's this girl that walks out of class "I'm still drunk" (laughing) Please say it a little bit lower. Everybody wants to know.

Interviewer: When you encounter people like that, do you consider that to be just part of college life, that's just something that's part of the whole experience of college?

Respondent: I think so, yeah. I mean I'm 20, I'm not even old enough to legally drink but if I lived up here I'm sure I would., because that's just part of it. Everybody does it.

Interviewer: Were there any other things, films, TV shows that might have influenced your thinking about college? American Pie is a big one. I remember when I was in high school when Animal House, I think I was in high school when Animal House came out. I went to see that and I remember thinking wow, that's what they do at college? Wow! I was a first-generation student as well. I had a lot of the same experiences although I came here to ETSU. I didn't go to a community college first and I stayed in the dorm at first. So it was like total immersion for me. But, I loved it. When I talk about college culture it's all the different experiences. I remember having a friend and we'd go to this place called Richard A's down on Walnut Street and he would get so drunk and then he would throw up everywhere. I remember once I was trying to drag him out of Richard A's and ran into a couple of my professors from the English dept coming in and they were like "Oh it looks like you're having fun". And I came to love that. For me it just all blended together into that whole experience of college.

Respondent: Well some of my friend's parents told me that I definitely needed to stay in a dorm to get the whole college experience, but I chose not to. And that's just a personal choice. It's nothing against I mean I would not like to live in a dorm I would do an apartment with a few other people, but not the dorm. That's too crazy for me and I would never study and I would never go to bed. Cause I'm a night person anyway so I (inaudible) go to bed. (laughing) No way.

Interviewer: It's true the dorms are wonderful if it meshes with your personality and so forth but that can be a learning experience all its own. You learn because you fail your first semester and so forth.

Interviewer: Do you think you've been changed by this experience?

Respondent: I think so, yeah. I've bettered myself. My knowledge has grown a lot and from high school. I didn't learn anything in high school. I mean it was like starting a blank page when I started college. It was totally new and that's where I began my learning experience.

Interviewer: Do you think this will have an impact, I mean you'll get a job and you'll have a nice salary and so forth, but are there other ways that this experience will impact your life later on, do you think?

Respondent: I will try, when I'm a high school teacher to persuade everybody that comes in my door to go to college. No matter if their on technical path or whatever that is my mission to get everyone that comes my way to go to college.

Interviewer: When you were in high school did your teachers talk to you a lot about going to college?

Respondent: No our guidance counselor didn't even mention it. We had a college day first semester and when I went to UT and when I came up here. And then I was in talent search because neither one of my parents went to college. So I did that through Tusculum and they took us to different places to learn about college. But that still was nothing like spending the day on campus.

Interviewer: Well tell me about that. What did you all do when you took the tours? Of UT and ETSU?

Respondent: At UT we just walked around. We didn't go in any of the buildings. We went and seen one of the dorms but mostly to get from one side of the campus to the other we were constantly walking. Up here we went in a class and sat and stayed. The professor let us go in. It was in a science building.

Interviewer: What did you think of that?

Respondent: Um, I liked it because I like seeing what the classroom size was. I got a feel for the professors and I just it made it more comfortable to me to go into the classroom and see what college was like.

Interviewer: Did that make a difference for you in choosing ETSU over UT? Definitely

Interviewer: Well, that's really what I wanted to ask you. You've given me lots of very useful information. I really appreciate this. Is there anything else that you would like to say about your experience in college?

Respondent: Not really. Does this get me my extra credit?

Interviewer: I'm sure it will.

### **Email Follow-up**

Interviewer: What has been your experience using computer technology at ETSU?

Respondent: I use it mainly for writing papers and doing research. I learned to do that at Walter State.

Interviewer: Before you enrolled at ETSU, how did you use computer technology?

Respondent: We wrote a few things in high school and had to use Microsoft Word, but I didn't do much with it. I didn't even own a computer until I started going to Walter State.

## **Second Email Follow-up**

Interviewer: You wrote that you had taken a women's studies course, Sherry. Could you expand on that experience?

Respondent: Right. I took a women's studies course to fulfill a requirement. The class made me think about what it means to be a woman but also a human being. I can take care of myself. And going to school is all about taking care of myself first. It's for me. I'm the first person in my family to go to school, and I intend to take full advantage of everything I can while I'm here.

Interviewer: Tell me more about the women's study course. You told me that there is an interesting story related to it.

Respondent: Oh yes. Here goes. For as long as I can remember, my mom and dad have worked. They didn't go to college, but they have worked hard to make sure we had everything we needed. Thing is, when they got home from work, mom continued working while dad watched television or spent time with his friends. Mom had to clean the house, cook dinner, and look after us kids. When I was taking the women's studies course, I brought her some of the essays we read in class. As part of a project for class, I interviewed her. She said that she never questioned the way things were in life. I kind of felt like it was my responsibility to get my mom thinking a little bit. After she read the articles from class, mom decided that it was okay for her to sit down and rest after work and let dad take care of dinner or use the vacuum. Dad didn't like it very much, but that's okay, too. Seriously, he was angry at first, but he's dealing with it. Mom says that things have to be more equal at home. I hope dad learns to agree with her.

Interviewer: Thanks, Sherry! This information will add some great detail to my study. Thanks!

## Theresa

Interviewer: When we were talking earlier, you told me about a special circumstance regarding your birth. Could you elaborate?

Respondent: Sure. I was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, which isn't really Appalachia, but my parents moved us here when I was a just a kid. I don't have any big memories of Charlotte.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself Appalachian?

Respondent: Absolutely! My parents are from this area, and I grew up here. I'm Appalachian through and through.

Interviewer: I recall that you told me in an email that your parents are from around here originally?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Where are they from?

Respondent: Ashe County over in North Carolina.

Interviewer: What brought you all back from Charlotte?

Respondent: My grandparents lived here so we decided to move over with them. And actually the main thing was my uncle. His wife got breast cancer so there was no one to really take care of their kids. So that was really the main reason that we moved here. And my grandparents were getting older, so it seemed like a good thing to come back to the area.

Interviewer: So it was a family decision to move back to the area?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Now do you live here in the Johnson City area or do you live over in Ashe County?

Respondent: I live here because of school but my parents live in Mountain City now.

Interviewer: Do you get over to Ashe County at all?

Respondent: Yea I do. I love it.

Interviewer: What do you love about Ashe County?

Respondent: Well, my granddad still lives there, and the mountains are so beautiful over there. It's quiet, just the birds singing. I love it there. I love to visit my granddad and sit on the front porch of his house and listen to him tell stories about the old days.

Interviewer: That's great, Theresa! We'll come back to it later.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: So how long have you been at ETSU?

Respondent: This is my first year.

Interviewer: Is this your second semester?

Respondent: Uh-huh I have a few credits I think. Let's see, about 15 credits that I took when I was in high school. So I got a little head start.

Interviewer: Did you go to high school over here or....?

Respondent: Johnson County

Interviewer: Was it one where you take regular college classes while you're in school?

Respondent: Yea

Interviewer: Was that done through ETSU or Northeast State?

Respondent: Some were through Virginia Highlands and others were at Northeast State.

Interviewer: What made you choose ETSU?

Respondent: Well it was close to home. I like the environment really. It's a big school but it's not so big that you get lost and you feel overwhelmed.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Respondent: I do. I have an older sister and a younger brother.

Interviewer: Are either of them in college?

Respondent: My sister is um working at a nursing home. So hopefully she'll be going to college soon but not at the time. And then Ricky, he's not even in high school.

Interviewer: Let me ask you about your younger brother. Do you think when he gets to high school, based on your experiences; do you think it will be impressed on him that he needs to go to college?

Respondent: Yes, definitely. From my parents kinda saying well, Theresa's going to college and look how much better her income will be than like my older sister whenever we compare. Mine will be a lot better so definitely go to college. So I think he'll be definitely persuaded to.

Interviewer: Well, what about you? What kind of persuasion did you have when you were in high school?

Respondent: I just knew I was going to college. I um seen the kind of lives that my parents had and I wanted more and I wanted to get that through education. Cause that was the only way to get more money and I kept my grades up in high school so I could get scholarships so that I could go to college. So it was important from the get go for me.

Interviewer: What about your high school teachers? Did they talk to you about going to college?

Respondent: Yea, definitely. They helped more than probably anyone.

Interviewer: Did your parents talk to you much about it?

Respondent: They did but they, they wanted me to but they kinda left it up to me. But then again they also knew that I was I wanted to and I was gonna go. I was going to find a way.

Interviewer: So you have support from them?

Respondent: Yes, definitely

Interviewer: Did any of your high school teachers talk about; were any of them graduates of ETSU? Or did they talk about ETSU?

Respondent: Everybody in Mountain City talks about ETSU, that's usually where they go. Most of my teachers were from ETSU and I actually had planned to go to a different college and I was comparing ETSU and the other college, they made it clear that ETSU was a good choice. That helped a lot in my decision.

Interviewer: What other school were you thinking about going to?

Respondent: Belmont Abbey, it's in Mt Holly, North Carolina. It's a Catholic school. And they have a really good public relations program and they are kinda affiliated with NASCAR. That's why I wanted to go. They have NASCAR internships.

Interviewer: Are you Catholic?

Respondent: No I just, that NASCAR thing. That's actually why I didn't go, because they're Catholic.

Interviewer: I want you to think back to your very first day of college. After you've done all that planning and so forth. What was it like?

Respondent: It was much different than I expected. I guess I don't know it was so new and I've moved around a lot so I've been to a bunch of different schools but college is a whole new experience. You think everyone is going to be staring at you, you're saying aw look there's a freshman but no it's funny because no one knows if you're a freshman or a senior. The professors were a lot nicer actually than I expected them to be. Cause everyone said well your professors won't help you and it's just gonna be....And they all gave you their phone numbers and they do made themselves available so I was really glad about that. I guess I was a little bit overwhelmed but not as much as I expected to be. I think I had it under control.

Interviewer: What about things like class size? Did you have any worries about that sort of thing?

Respondent: Well, in that area, yeah. I had this one class in an auditorium. I didn't care for it. It was too big. Um, too many people. I felt lost from the first day of class. I had no idea what was going on, and I didn't talk to anyone else in the class. I dropped it because I couldn't stand going there after the first week.

Interviewer: The large classes can be intimidating. Have you taken any large classes since then?

Respondent: Yeah, um a couple. But I definitely prefer the smaller classes, like in the English department.

Interviewer: I agree. So, Theresa, had you visited the campus before? Were you familiar with ETSU and Johnson City?

Respondent: Oh, Yea.

Interviewer: That probably made a difference too.

Respondent: Definitely

Interviewer: Now did you participate in any of the pre-semester events they have for freshman?

Respondent: No I didn't. Actually missed the deadline so that's why.

Interviewer: We talked a little bit about your family. They support you and what you're doing. What about your friends from high school. Did any of them choose to go to college?

Respondent: Yeah, almost everyone I was friends with did go to college a lot of people that I were just acquaintances with, they didn't go. Some people. But most of them, yeah, are in college now.



Interviewer: Did a lot of them come here to ETSU?

Respondent: Um some of them did. My closest friends went to like the Christian schools, Milligan and King. That's where they went but some of them did. Actually my roommate and a couple of our friends we came to ETSU.

Interviewer: So you have sort of a support system of friends?

Respondent: Definitely. It would have made the whole college experience a lot different I think if they wouldn't have been there for me.

Interviewer: Does that tie into being a first-generation student?

Respondent: Yeah it's good to have your friends. Definitely

Interviewer: Do you know for instance among your friends were there a lot of them who would be first-generation students?

Respondent: Um, out of the three closest friends that I have that came here from Johnson County, they're all first-generation. We kinda supported each other I guess.

Interviewer: You had kinda your own little cohorts.....

Respondent: Yea

Interviewer: Now, let's get back to your Appalachian roots. Are you aware of Appalachian culture, Appalachian heritage from your position as someone who came here from outside Appalachia?

Respondent: Well in high school we had a huge study of the Appalachian culture so I was learned a lot through that.

Interviewer: What does it mean to you, Appalachian culture?

Respondent: I think it, I think it actually means more to me than if I were from like from Charlotte in that area had its own culture I think I would be more in tune with Appalachian rather than where I had originally came from cause it's such a big deal in everybody's lives you know. What happened back then and their grandparents being in the same house they've been in and in the same land it's just its beautiful to me that people can live that kind of life so long. Like my grandpa rents actually didn't have power at their house in Ashe County until I was in seventh grade. Yeah it was ridiculous. But it's something that I loved and now I think I'm glad I got to experience that because kids these days they don't really they're like what no power? But I feel glad that I got to experience that and know a little bit like how it used to be and how it is today. So I think it's really important that we instill values then and now to the younger generation.

Interviewer: Do you think that Appalachian culture has a lot of those values sort of that have been handed down from generation to generation?

Respondent: Yeah definitely

Interviewer: Did you feel that from your grandparents?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: How would you describe your grandparents that way then?

Respondent: My grandparents have beliefs that they will never change um, no matter what. They like to do stuff in a more simple way than I mean they don't have internet or you know they try to do it how their grandparents did it and they want they want us to see we worked hard and you have to work hard. You know work and even education to them is really important for me to have because they didn't have it and they want you know a better life but they still they want me to hold on to the values that their generation had. Their whole family has had.

Interviewer: But they value education as well.

Respondent: Definitely

Interviewer: They look to the past but they also look to the future too.

Respondent: Definitely Even if they don't understand it they still want me to understand both sides I guess.

Interviewer: A couple of students have talked to me about technology and about how coming to college suddenly they were hit with all this technology that they didn't expect would be here. Is that something that you experienced?

Respondent: Yeah, it was um a lot of like things on the computer there's things that I don't even know or understand how to work and how to use. Like my fiancé over there he knows, he's from the same area but he's a computer science major so he knows all of the you know technology and I'm like what? What's going on? I don't hardly try to learn cause I know it's just confusing me. But even like with my grandparents me being on the internet high speed internet all the time they think that I'm just a star because I know how to work the computer and they'll call me and my mom just got internet at her house and they'll call me and say you know how do you do this, I'm in college so I'm suppose to know and I don't I just try to help as much as I can.

Interviewer: Do you think that in their minds has college changed you in a sense that maybe you know everything?

Respondent: Yeah, definitely, my whole family acts like that even my I have younger cousins and I'm hoping like me being in college will help them know that they need to go because like their dad tells them you don't need to go to college, I didn't go to college, you don't need to. And I'm trying to push that yes you do need to go to college and hoping that they can see me and see what I'm learning to make an impact on their lives. They just think that I'm the smartest person in the world cause I'm going to college. It's really sweet.

Interviewer: I've heard that from a lot of people. Maybe you could influence your cousins to go to college.

Respondent: They're young so I got a lot of time to work on it.

Interviewer: What is your major?

Respondent: It's business right now.

Interviewer: For you then as a business major is college a stepping stone to something else for you?

Respondent: Definitely. What I had originally planned to do was get my business degree and maybe open some kind of store in Mountain City maybe. I was thinking either a pet store or a jewelry store actually which are complete opposites but just to help the economy there and you know I want to do something. I want to have a degree where I can actually live in Mountain City and work because most people drive hours just to get to their jobs. I wanted something that I could kinda live there and appreciate and help you know help the economy and all of that.

Interviewer: So you see yourself going back to Mountain City?

Respondent: Definitely

Interviewer: It's pretty there; I've been to Mountain City one time. It's nice.

Respondent: Yeah it's really, its small so my fiancé actually doesn't ever want to move back to Mountain City. He's been there his whole life and you know there's a Wal-mart here, there's everything to him.

Interviewer: Imagine that I am a high school junior or senior and I come to you and say I'm sorta thinking about college but I'm not sure and what would you tell me?

Respondent: Ok I would say you definitely need to go to college. A lot of people I think don't really realize how much college is so much better than high school. I mean cause you're there for so long and you think I don't want to be in school anymore. I'm sick of it. But it's not like eight hours a day, five days a week like it is in high school. And you have a lot more freedom to you know it's so much different at least if you're not gonna go the

whole four years at least try it out. Cause I think once people would get here they would really realize it's not so bad you know four years you can handle that.

Interviewer: It goes by so quickly.....

Respondent: It does. And I would also say you know what can you do without a college education now. It's so important. Hardly anything is going to give you as much money and even like a better lifestyle than college if you're a college graduate you're gonna have more options and you're gonna be available to a lot of things that you didn't even know of. You learn a lot of you're educated but you're also have a lot more experiences than someone who didn't go to college. It just makes for a better life in general.

Interviewer: Statistics show that a college educated person compared to someone with just a high school degree will earn a million dollars or more throughout their career than the person who just has the high school degree.

Respondent: It's a good return on your investment.

Interviewer: Do you feel so far that college has changed you?

Respondent: I do I feel, lets see how do I say this, from then and now I feel more, lets see, basically it's changed my whole life as far as growing up and being on my own. And just being educated enough to feel like something's better. I do this I'm going to get something better than I would of if I wouldn't of gone to college.

Interviewer: So you would say your self confidence is...

Respondent: Right that's a good way to put it. I feel really lucky about getting to go to college and getting to have the experiences because a lot of people even if they could get scholarships and stuff they don't know about them. They can't give up. And that's what I was determined not to do. I feel really privileged that I actually got to come to college and that I'm here.

Interviewer: Did you visit? Well, you're familiar with ETSU because you live in the area...

Respondent: Yeah we actually my English teacher had brought us up here a couple of times to use the library and she just let us walk around you know make ourselves familiar with the campus. She came her so she actually knew a lot about it.

Interviewer: She talked about ETSU....

Respondent: Definitely

Interviewer: And you used the library some?

Respondent: We did research projects and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Before you came to college were their movies or TV programs or things that you saw that gave you certain ideas about what college would be like?

Respondent: Definitely, I thought I was going to get in the dorm room and there was going to be a bunch of people with pizza and beer running around every second and there was going to be parties and craziness. I was so glad that once I got here that's not how. I was actually cause I don't do that kinda stuff. I'm not into the parties I can't really, I can't, because I work full time and go to school full time it's hard I can't even hardly study. That's more important to me but. I was definitely I had a faults (?) expect it to be so laid back. Quiet even. You hear about parties and stuff like that but not everyone is drunk all the time like I thought it would be.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's not Animal House.

Respondent: Definitely not.

Interviewer: What about your classes and professors did you have certain preconceptions?

Respondent: Yeah I thought it was going to be a lot different actually more strict I guess. I didn't realize how you know don't come to school, whatever we don't care, we're doing our job. So, I thought it would be more like high school in that aspect. But I'm glad that it's more like (?) and not so strict as high school but the thing is you have to realize that I'm paying for this class that I need to go.

Interviewer: Have you enjoyed your classes at ETSU?

Respondent: Yes I have. I didn't talk much in class at first, but I do like the classes.

Interviewer: Why didn't you talk very much in class?

Respondent: I figured I didn't know anything worth sharing in class. I felt like the other students in class knew much more than I did, so I kept to myself and didn't say anything.

Interviewer: Is that still something that you do?

Respondent: Not really. That was early on. Now, I speak up more. I still have trouble asking my professors questions, but I like saying things in class. It's easier now.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Respondent: Well, I guess I'm getting used to being a college student. I learned what's expected from me. At first, I had no idea what to say or do in class. When I made a few low grades, I figured I better start asking questions in class. It worked. Like I said, I took responsibility for learning.

Interviewer: So that's part of that growing up thing. Taking responsibility....

Respondent: Right

Interviewer: Were there any specific movies or TV programs that you saw any titles that you remember?

Respondent: I was thinking about this actually earlier today, I can't remember which show I was thinking about. I remember, um let's see, specifics.. I was thinking today about *Saved by the Bell* when they were in college. And how I think he got into (?) his classes and his teacher was like selling the answers (inaudible) But I just thought that is not how it is in high school you know, no teacher is going to pretend and do that. As far as on that show those teachers really helped out a lot you know and it was probably a better thing to watch than like *American Pie* where they're all acting crazy. So I was just thinking about that today that's the only one I can remember right now.

Interviewer: Based on the information you've given me I would say you're pretty positive about you're college experience. This is a good thing. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about being a college student about being a first-generation student about Appalachian culture about anything like that?

Respondent: Um let's see, I guess that's it just overall it's positive I think being a first year student. I have to work harder than people who their parents are more educated, they make more money. I wouldn't of been able to go to school if not for scholarships and my grades and now that I'm here I work full time so 40 hours a week and 16 hours of classes. It's really hard but it's worth it. And I'm positive about it and I'm glad I have the experience and I'm not going to complain and say well, I have to work all the time I go to college because Really it's lucky but it's a good thing.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Respondent: The part about being from Appalachia. That's important too. We have a beautiful culture in Appalachia, and I think students should be proud of it. We should be proud of our hillbilly culture. [laughter]

Interviewer: Do you use hillbilly in a positive way?

Respondent: Oh yeah. I think it's kinda cool to be a hillbilly. I'm proud of it. It's something my parents and grandparents passed down to me, and I'm going to pass it along to my children someday.

Interviewer: That's great, Theresa. Thanks so much for volunteering for this interview.

Respondent: My pleasure.

## Laura

*Note: Due to scheduling conflicts, most of this interview took place via email. Laura approached me to be part of this study because she specifically wanted to talk about life in Appalachia.*

Interviewer: Laura, why don't we begin with a little information about yourself. Where are you from originally?

Respondent: I grew up right here in East Tennessee on my parents' dairy farm outside Bristol.

Interviewer: How long have you been a student at ETSU?

Respondent: This is my senior year. I'm an education major with a specialty in high school English and drama.

Interviewer: When we talked on the phone, you told me that you were eager to talk about being Appalachian. Could you share your thoughts on what it means to be Appalachian, especially in the new century?

Respondent: What does being Appalachian mean to me? That is a very complex question. I guess, in one way, I am lucky because I was born and raised "Appalachian" and never had to suffer the identity crisis that so many college students or young adults go through. My heritage is filled with concepts (and some stereotypes) of Appalachian life. My grandfathers (that word is too formal really- my papaws) were both coal miners. My paternal papaw was an organizer for the union in Kentucky when he was a young man. My maternal papaw was a life time coal miner and work in the mines in Haysi, Virginia until he was permanently injured when a shaft fell in. He died of black lung when I was fourteen years old. My fondest memory of Haysi was showing him the fossils we (my cousins and I) dug out of the coal veins in the back yard of his house on Big A Mountain. My mother still has his dinner pail. He carried it in the mines each day for years when she was a child. Coal dust, and being Appalachian, is so ingrained in me it is a part of my DNA.

Interviewer: What was your life like as a child in Appalachia?

Respondent: I was raised on a farm near Bristol, Tennessee and my youth was spent in rural pursuits with my family. We all worked together to make a life on the farm. We raised cattle and tobacco and in the evenings told stories about the old days. I was raised in the knowledge that my parents were living near the Bristol because it was the "big city" in the heart of Appalachia. All the relatives on both sides came to our house to visit in the summer and the holidays. Bristol represented all the advantages of modern life-it was improved Appalachia- there were no mines and no unions to hurt folks. It was where the coal families of my clan sent their kids to make a better life and we all knew it.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself Appalachian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Respondent: Oh, yes. I identify myself as Appalachian because I am so proud to be a 21st century Appalachian woman. I am not the stereotype as much as I claim some concepts related to the stereotypical definition. I am not raw-boned and do not have either five kids or a no good husband. I have never handled a snake for a religious purpose and I do not go barefoot unless I am walking around the pool. I am not either blessed with unparalleled knowledge of wildlife or common sense or am I ignorant of “book knowledge”. I am a 22-year-old single mother of one that studies literature and drama, and I am Appalachian. I email, I text, I twitter, and I am sending this in via facebook, but I am Appalachian. I eat sushi at least once a week and yet I can still make bologna gravy with my Aunts. I have tasted moonshine, but neither make nor sale it. I am educated, strong, connected to both my family and the internet, and I am Appalachian.

Interviewer: What about college? Did you know you were going to go to college when you were in high school?

Respondent: College for me was a given. I was not one of those kids with the option of going to college after high school-my Dad made sure to tell me every week or so just how hard he worked so I wouldn't have to waste away doing physical labor. While my older brother had the choice of more schooling or working with my father, for us girls it was only the institutes of higher learning. I can't recall ever having a discussion with my family that involved another option. It was just the illusive “college” and whatever that entailed. High school was merely the first hoop I had to jump through to get to academia.

Interviewer: Tell me more about your high school experiences.

Respondent: High school was easy for me academically as I was an attentive student who enjoyed reading and learning, in fact I was probably annoyingly engaged in classes because I would much rather be doing school work than farm work. Blessedly, I had phenomenal teachers able to handle my energy and willing to work with my vast interest in the arts, history, philosophy, and literature. I was a little eccentric, but well liked by my teachers and by most of the students. High school was socially simple as well as everyone knew me, my siblings, my parents, the farm, and all my friends had went to school with me since kindergarten. We all had a common background and spoke a shared language.

Interviewer: When you got to college, what was it like for you?

Respondent: College has been a life altering experience on so many levels it could take days to write about it. I remember going to orientation the summer after my senior year and I could sense the freedom I was soon to have. The second I arrived that fall, I reveled in that freedom on all levels. Academically, I asked all the questions I was hesitant to ask in my conservative high school. Socially, I was free to discover the real me not associated with family ties and thirteen years of school history. Spiritually, I was free to challenge my faith and find my own reasons for the meaning of life. It was a grand, eye-opening time and I was giddy.



Interviewer: Were there any downsides to the experience?

Respondent: Oh, sure. I did make some major mistakes due to underexposure and ignorance of university life. I graduated high school eleventh in a class of over two hundred students. I had several AP classes under my belt and was active in many clubs and schools groups, yet I never even filled out a FASFA until my junior year. I was so ignorant of financial aid matters. The only scholarship I received was purely academic and I missed all my other chances for help. I learned the hard way that if you are going to get aid you need to start your freshman year, because by the time I needed it my junior year, it was truly hard to receive.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Respondent: I was also ignorant of the language of the university. I had no idea what a professor was or what tenure was or even how the credit system worked. Yes, I listened in orientation, but no one bothered to explain to me the basic math of how credits add up to graduation and the more credits you take each term the sooner you graduate if those are the credits you need. I have about eighteen hours of just wonderful, fulfilling, but wasted courses, because I didn't even know I had an advisor until the first semester of my senior year, just this past year. I just registered for what I wanted and tried to follow the catalog as best I could. Oh, and I knew absolutely nothing about computers. I had no idea how I could use a computer and the Internet to access research sources when I was in Freshman Composition courses. I learned none of that in high school.

Interviewer: What does it mean to be a first-generation college student from Appalachia?

Respondent: Being a first-generation college student from Appalachia means responsibility to me. I am not sure if everyone feels this way or not, but I feel a strong need to give back some of my education to others. I strive to work in the community (still the heart of Appalachia as far as I am concerned) and make the path to learning easier for others. I feel lucky that I have been able to go to school and want to spread that blessing around as much as I can. I'm going to be teaching soon. When I start, I want to make sure my students have a strong sense of community identity and pride, a sense of self-worth, and a sense of hope. Yes, they can go to college. Yes, they can get aid. Yes, they can make a difference in the world. I want them to live beyond the stereotype as I have.

Interviewer: From what you've told me, Laura, I would say that you are a fan of education.

Respondent: Absolutely. I believe education is the best way to change your life and to make your life better. I just wrote a paper about using certain films to get high school students talking about going to college. I picked *October Sky* because it speaks to students in Appalachia who feel that they are torn between what they want to do with their lives and what their parents want them to do. I feel I have a mission to work with these students, to show them that education is the way out.

Interviewer: What would you tell a high school junior or senior who was considering college?

Respondent: I would tell them to get off their butts and do what they have to do to get into college. It will change their lives for the better. I would also tell them to get those FAFSA forms and fill them out fearlessly. They have to get through all the little hoops. It's part of the process. In the end, though, having a college education is worth every penny and every ounce of energy.

Interviewer: Did you have someone in high school who pushed you to apply for college?

Respondent: Yes, I did. Mr. [name withheld] saw my potential before I did, and he told me that I really needed to go to college. He studied here, so naturally he told me about East Tennessee State. He said that I could do anything I wanted, but that I should focus on being a writer, which is what I am doing. I wouldn't have known what to do without his help.

Interviewer: What about technology, Laura? What was your experience with, say, computers and other forms of digital technology when you enrolled in college?

Respondent: That's a funny story, I guess. Honestly, as passionate as I was about education generally, I had no idea how to use technology to help me with my passion. Don't get me wrong, I had used computers in high school, and I owned a computer, but I had no idea how to use a computer and the Internet to access sources when I was in freshman composition courses. I learned none of that in high school. I knew how to use a computer for MySpace, and I was a text message veteran. I just didn't know how useful computers could be for research. It was a learning experience.

## Nathan

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about yourself, where you're from, your experiences with college thus far, how long you've been in and what your major is, like an introduction you would do in a regular college class.

Respondent: My name is Nathan. I'm was born and raised in Johnson City, TN. ETSU is practically in my backyard. The first semester I had a couple of demanding classes. So I spent really most of my time outside of class during the day either in the library or at home studying or working a part time job. I found a lot of friends here. But for the most part I guess, college is what I thought it would be as in work and I just found out that if you do work enough then it's not hard to make good grades.

Interviewer: What's your major?

Respondent: Right now it's pre-business. I plan on getting that switched over as soon as possible to exercise science because I want to be pre-physical therapy.

Interviewer: And this is your second semester?

Respondent: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: And you are first-generation student?

Respondent: Yes sir.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about what you expected from college before you got here.

Respondent: I expected a lot of social groups and a lot harder work than in high school, obviously. So, I pretty much prepared myself to have to spend a lot more time outside of the classroom working on my own, my own time. Cause I'd figure it'd be, a lot of it would be riding on our own responsibility. And I guess really for the most part figured I'd be spending more of my time in school towards my education than I did in high school.

Interviewer: How did you come up with these expectations?

Respondent: Where did these ideas come from? I guess from what you've read. What you've heard. In the past how people have said how difficult it can be, how much work it can be and how time consuming college can be.

Interviewer: Did your high school teachers talk about it?

Respondent: They talked about just the preparation. The things that they said to that you would need to know to get you prepared for college. I guess just everything that you've built up

throughout high school and throughout all your other education levels. You really thought well this is where it all comes together, kinda builds it up to.

Interviewer: Where did you go to high school?

Respondent: Science Hill.

Interviewer: Were there any movies or television programs that you saw that portrayed college in a certain way?

Respondent: I guess, what really gave me a, I guess what put college into my mind, first thing that I really started to think about college was *Saved by the Bell Goes College*. I guess watching that really got me like oh, that must be what college is like. Which is kinda similar but not really.

Interviewer: What was college like on *Saved by the Bell*?

Respondent: It was.....really everybody's really social, involved with their friends, living in dorms, which I don't do, but gave you the idea of that. And just being in class and the work that you do outside of class together through work, which you don't do too much of in high school. Then the breaks and the time that you have away from class. And stuff like that.

Interviewer: You don't live in a dorm?

Respondent: I still live at home.

Interviewer: Have you thought about living in a dorm?

Respondent: I did. I get a pretty decent amount of money in grants so I thought about maybe taking some of the money and going ahead and buying me a dorm with one of them for at least a semester to see. I'm still kinda looking into that maybe toward my sophomore junior year, maybe, just to see.

Interviewer: What's your perception of living in a dorm?

Respondent: Small but at the same time I guess I could learn a lot more responsibility of being out on my own, being forced to take care of my own things. Keep my own things clean which is clothes and provide myself with my own meals.

Interviewer: What about the social aspects of living in a dorm?

Respondent: Just you're around so many more people. I've got my best friend lives in a dorm and there's always either if there's not people in his dorm room then he's in another person's dorm room. Just a lot more group activity.

Interviewer: Is the college experience different for people who live in dorms than opposed to people who stay at home?

Respondent: I think so cause I think since you're around campus more I've met people who live in a dorm that just seem like they just know so many more people and know so many more activities and groups around campus because they're here 24/7. Whereas whenever I get out of class I just go to my house or to work and I'm not as involved with the activities around campus. So I think, I think honestly, probably coming from me who hasn't lived in a dorm yet probably to be involved it'd be better to live in a dorm.

Interviewer: Go back to your very first day of college, is this your second semester? Yeah Go back to your first day of college, last August and think about what that day was like, the classes you took, the people that you saw, the professors that you interacted with. Think about everything that went on that day and narrate that for me. What was that day like for you?

Respondent: You have a lot larger classes than high schools when I walked into two auditorium classes in one day I was really shocked about that and I guess throughout all of your education before this you're with everybody your same age. And whenever you get to college there's people who in my class that could've been my father's age or older than my father. I've seen people who could be my grandparent's age. So that's a lot different as well. And then the professor, the teachers, professors, both just act; they're so much difference in them and their attitudes than there is in high school. Cause high school they feel like they're your guardian for the day. Where as the professor and teacher is just there to teach you. If you don't want to come to learn then it's obviously you know they.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

Respondent: Me personally I felt good about it because I don't feel that a teacher should have to be a guardian or have to be a babysitter for students so I've always been one to where I want my teacher to just instruct me and keep it on the students for them to be responsible enough to do their own assignments. Plus they have a lot more control in the classroom than high school teachers do.

Interviewer: What about your feelings that day?

Respondent: Nervous! You're around so many more people; the ratio of students to faculty members is a lot higher than high school, obviously.

Interviewer: I've had a lot of people tell me in these interviews that the first day they kinda felt lost.

Respondent: Yeah, exactly. I made sure that two weeks, at least two weeks before my classes started I went around and got myself familiar with the buildings and the classroom numbers. So I pretty much knew where everything was, but at the same time there's still

that feeling in your head, what if I went in the wrong classroom and what if I go in the wrong place. The embarrassment of that so you're just still really scared.

Interviewer: Do you think that living nearby helped you in the transition to college?

Respondent: Definitely because I've been around the campus my whole life so I'm very familiar with everything around it. If I have a quick class or a quick break in between my classes and I need to go grab something to eat a little off campus, I know where everything is at. And also being able to be (cough) I had time before classes started to be able to go around and figure out where my classes would be, whereas somebody who's coming from six hours away they don't have that time to do that.

Interviewer: Did you participate in any of the pre-semester things that went on?

Respondent: I guess, orientation and I came to something in the spring. I think it was like a, it was right at the end of high school, right before I graduated, somewhat like a preview. Just like an orientation except for not quite for students yet. I guess it's was more to attract you to the campus.

Interviewer: Did you find that effective, did you think that was a good thing?

Respondent: It got you familiar with all the buildings names. Even if you forgot a couple here or there. There was still the main buildings like the Culp Center of the resources they showed you the where the computer labs were at in the Culp Center or where you would be eating at. Basically you got a good idea how far apart each class would be of your core classes. So you got a pretty good understanding of that.

Interviewer: During any of the pre-semester things did you get a chance to meet any professors or other students or sit in any classes or anything like that?

Respondent: I never got to sit in any classes but you met some professors. A bunch of professors spoke what you would be required to do in college. The transition from high school into college and then a lot of the leaders of the orientation groups and leaders of the spring, I guess we'll call it the spring orientation; a lot of them were upper level students, like juniors and seniors. They really were able to tell you a lot of things that the teachers or professors wouldn't want to tell you and give you a pretty good idea of that.

Interviewer: What were some of the things the professors told you about college?

Respondent: They just said you would rely a lot more on technology here in school these days than you probably ever thought that you would. You really need to become aware of that. They really informed or tried to persuade you to take particular classes such as ETSU1000 (cough) which I'm taking. Just they try to tell you what classes you need to take, try to persuade you to go ahead and choose your major that way you're not floating around as a undecided major forever taking unnecessary courses that you don't need to take. It helps with preparing, I guess.

Interviewer: Is that something you would recommend for all students, especially first-generation students?

Respondent: Yeah, definitely cause I mean anything that can help, especially being a first-generation student take advantage of.

Interviewer: Do you feel that first-generation students might be at any special disadvantage when they come to college?

Respondent: I don't personally think so I feel that if anything I have an advantage over students who have had their parents go to school cause I feel like I just have that more of a push to me to be able to graduate and be the first person in my family to get a degree from school. Being the youngest and last person to be able to in this generation I just feel like if I do that then I'll have the bragging rights and everything like that so. It just kinda really motivates me to be able to do it.

Interviewer: What about being Appalachian? Does being Appalachian figure into your view of yourself as a college student?

Respondent: No. Not really. I don't really think of myself as being Appalachian. Appalachian? That's a mountain range. I live in Appalachia, but I'm not Appalachian. [laughter]

Interviewer: Is there another term you would use to describe yourself?

Respondent: Maybe Southern or American. I like American.

Interviewer: How about Tennessean?

Respondent: I've never used Tennessean, but I guess I would. It's better than Appalachian.

Interviewer: Why is Appalachian a negative term for you?

Respondent: I think it's the stereotypes that are associated with being from Appalachia that get to me.

Interviewer: Do you have an example?

Respondent: Yes, I do. I saw a show on television about this man who travels around the world eating exotic food. He came to Appalachia, and he didn't even pronounce it right. He pronounced it with a long A in the middle, which is wrong. And he ate things like possum and squirrel and raccoon and even some bear. I've never eaten any of those things, but he said that all of those foods are part of the Appalachian diet, like we still live like people did a hundred years ago. I must not be Appalachian, because possum and bear and squirrel...are not part of my diet. He said that people in Tennessee have jobs like

whittling and storytelling. Who was he talking to? Because he sure didn't talk to anyone I know.

Interviewer: That is a remarkable story. I can't say that I know anyone who whittles for a living, but I do know a few storytellers.

Respondent: Yeah, but the point is that not everyone earns a living from storytelling.

Interviewer: Correct. Good point.

Respondent: Not off the top of my head, but I do have a gripe about something.

Interviewer: What's that?

Respondent: Cornbread. I just heard someone talking about cornbread with sugar.

Interviewer: [Laughing] I have the same gripe, I think.

Respondent: Yeah, I can't stand what I call "Yankee cornbread" with sugar in it. I've had corn bread outside of the South and it tasted like crumbly yellow cake.

Interviewer: Yes. We do have similar feelings about cornbread. Some of the other people I've interviewed talked about cornbread as well. Traditional cornbread must be a true Appalachian recipe.

Respondent: That's what I would say.

Interviewer: What about other aspects of Appalachian culture?

Respondent: I have thought about taking a bluegrass music class.

Interviewer: Really? Tell me about that.

Respondent: Well, I feel like it's part of my roots, my culture, and I like the way it sounds. I want to learn more about it.

Interviewer: That's great, Nathan! I encourage you to take the course. I think you'll find it to be quite interesting.

Respondent: I'm planning on taking it next summer.

Interviewer: Okay. That's good. Now, you mentioned your parents earlier. How do your family and friends feel about you making this decision to come to ETSU?

Respondent: My family and friends are more involved in my education than I ever imagined they would be. From even my friends who are at other colleges call me up to see how I did on



my exam that they had heard about or my family every single time I see them, how are you doing in school, how are your grades being cause they're so concerned and they know what I'm capable of doing so they want me to not fall short of my standards of their standards for me because I just think that's really helpful for them to be there for them to keep pushing me that way if for some reason something went wrong with me psychologically and I wanted to fall out of line I don't feel like I could because they're there to back me up and I feel like I'm not just letting myself down I'm letting them down as well. They're pushing me

Interviewer: So it's like a big responsibility?

Respondent: Exactly

Interviewer: So I take it, like your parents were pushing you to go to college, you knew that you were going to go to college before you...?

Respondent: Yeah, definitely. Like I told my dad I got a B on my mid-term he was... What's going on there?

Interviewer: When did you first become aware that your parents wanted you to go to college? And what did that mean to you?

Respondent: My whole life, I guess back early school, probably either late elementary school or early middle school I just always knew. I'd always said my whole goal was to go to school, get a good education, and play sports in college. I turned down my athletic scholarships that way I could go to ETSU and just strictly focus on academics. But I've known my whole life, my parents are pretty much, I've talked to my parents my whole life. They always said just go to school and get you a good college education and make you some money one day, be successful. So that's always been my goal and their goal for me.

Interviewer: Now tell me about your choice of ETSU. Was it important that you chose ETSU as opposed to maybe going to UT, or University of Memphis, something like that?

Respondent: I think so because earlier we had talked about how I thought it was an advantage to be able to live close and once again I've been around campus my whole life I still have my family here. I have my family (inaudible) I'm very involved with them. So if I would've went off I would've been more lost even more I guess depending on myself or independent the whole time I was there. Where here I have so many people that are backing me up that are pushing me that are keeping me positive. So I just think I think I made a good choice in choosing ETSU or staying local.

Interviewer: Imagine that I would be a first-generation student, I am probably a junior or senior in high school and I come to you and say I don't know what I want to do. I'm thinking about going to ETSU. What would you tell me?

Respondent: Benefits of going to college whereas not going to college totally outweigh not going to college. So the benefits are better. Your education is obviously the most important thing that I feel whether you're wanting to make money, whether you just want to be successful in any other way. Almost everything these days consist of how high your education level is. So I would totally stress the importance of that. Also, I would just tell them that there's so many other things than just being successful and making money and getting a college education. It's learning things as a person whenever you get to college because there's so many more experiences that you haven't experienced yet. Whenever you get to college such as you have so many social activities that you can be involved in that help your personality out. I guess just totally better yourself as a person in the long run. I'd tell them to choose ETSU over colleges around here like Milligan or Tusculum, smaller schools because you're just around so many more ethnicities. There's a greater diversity. Exactly

Interviewer: What would you advise me, what things should I keep in mind as I'm preparing to enter ETSU? What are some of the things that I should do to get ready to come to ETSU?

Respondent: Go ahead and get the technology that you're going to need such as go ahead and start saving up for a laptop or a computer if you don't already own one. Get yourself mentally prepared because once the semester starts you really have to devote at least everyday a pretty decent amount of time two, three hours if you want to be able and be successful in college, make A's, B's. Be prepared to devote a couple of hours a day to studying, working and just go to class every single day. If you miss class, so many people say school is so easy or school's hard, school's so hard to make an A in, school's hard to make a B in but most of those people are people who haven't been attending class. And that's one thing that really annoys me. Have the right attitude going into college as in being prepared.

Interviewer: You mentioned technology a couple of times.

Respondent: Yeah, found that could be your best friend in college. All the new.....Like what we're doing. Exactly, everything they're coming out with, you can go to school without the technology, you can choose not to have it but you'll spend a lot more time on your work. You'll spend it'll be more difficult for you because a lot of technology now you can push a button and it'll transfer that into such as citations on Word. You can turn something from MLA to APA just for a (inaudible) button. It just saves a lot of time it's so helpful. I would suggest any college student, first-generation or not to.

Interviewer: Well now have you run into any problems you might warn a potential freshman about?

Respondent: Before I answer that I have one more thing for the last one. Apply for as many scholarships as you can. Whether you think you'll get it whether or not you'll fall under the criteria for that scholarship. If you have the correct, I guess, if you have everything that is needed for that scholarship apply for it. Any little bit of money helps. Ok back to that question, could you repeat it please.

Interviewer: Have you run into any problems you might warn a potential freshman about?

Respondent: If you're going to get a job outside of school, whether it be on campus or not on campus, make sure that it's a job that will not conflict with your school schedule. I've had too many times where I've had a presentation or a paper due the next day or an exam the next day and I've asked off for that date and I haven't got it. It just makes it so much harder on you as a student if your job's not one of those jobs that'll wanna work around your schedule. Get a job with a very, very flexible schedule. Cause that really helps out. If you don't have a job then I guess other problems that I've ran into would be a stay away from things that can be very easy to fall into. Such as parties, cause once I've learned, not personally, not as a personal experience but I've learned through other people around me, very close to me that you get into that and then it's very addicting and you could be a straight A student one day, the next thing you know you could just not even care about class. Flexible job and stay away from the unnecessary events.

Interviewer: Is there a culture that comes along with college that a first-generation student might not be aware of? Are there experiences that a first-generation student might not know very much about?

Respondent: Of course being aware of the parties, of course people know. Most people hear about the parties. I guess if you are a first-generation student then (long pause) you haven't had that one really close person to you such as your family or anything like that be able to inform you of everything that's going on. You just heard from your teachers in high school and some other friends and you know say for instance you don't have friends that are older than you that have already experienced something in college than you're just going into it open minded having no idea of what's going on. I guess there is you know somewhat of a benefit of being of not being a first-generation student because you've had your parents you've had those people before you able to answer your questions and able to inform you of what could be going on. So I guess that is the only disadvantage of that I can really think of that you know really matters. Or not really equaled.

Interviewer: Do you feel that college has transformed you or changed you in any way?

Respondent: I feel like it's made me a lot I mean I've been here for a semester and a half and I feel like I'm already more of a responsible person cause last semester I had probability and statistics which I love math but I had a class from 8:15 till 9:35 then I didn't have prob & stats until 3:45 so Tuesdays and Thursdays every single day never missed a day. I was in the library from that break on until the next class either studying or tutoring the other students that were in that class. It's really made me more responsible being able to understand my priorities and get them straight and also off campus cause you devote so much time away from your family and in groups doing activities so you need more money so you learn that hey, maybe I need to get another job. Cause if you're a first-generation student chances are you don't really have that very, very, very reliable source of income behind of you from your parents. I guess it's made me aware that I need to

maintain a job, be responsible in that. That way I can provide myself a decent source of income that way I can be involved in these activities as well.

Interviewer: Do you have anything else that you would like to add about being a first-generation student, being an ETSU student anything that you want to add to this? Would you recommend ETSU to?

Respondent: I would definitely recommend ETSU because first of all it's a very good education now. The academics here are, I mean growing, I mean I think the business department was just accredited less than ten years ago and the pharmacy school the medicine school everything is growing here including the music department. I know I've went and watched one of their performances last year and or last semester and they're really good. Plus at least live one semester on campus whether it's in a dorm, whether it's in Buc Ridge I just think you get that experience you can't get outside living with your parents or whether you're living in an apartment with friends off campus. Just live at least one semester on. Yeah the dorms are small but at the same time you just learn so much about yourself and about your fellow students. Get involved with as many activities as you possibly can. Whether it's Buc Wild or Student Government Association, doesn't matter just get involved.

Interviewer: Do those things help you? Do they pull you into the.....?

Respondent: Yeah definitely Buc Wild, I joined that and I went to as many sporting events as I can which regardless, I would've went cause I'm a sports fan but then I just joined Alpha Lambda Delta which is Honor society and I just it gets you more involved in your community as well as on campus. It gets your name out there more and you leave a not only are you a first-generation student that's going out and impressing your parents but you're also a first-generation student that's leaving you're leaving a name for yourself at that college.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Respondent: I guess that's it.

Interviewer: So based on what you've told me college has been a positive experience for you?

Respondent: So far so good.

Interviewer: Are you going to go to Grad school?

Respondent: Oh yeah right after I graduate I wanna go straight into well I've got a semester an extra semester cause the physical therapy school doesn't start until the spring semester so I just figure if I have a 3.94 the first semester then doing pretty well this semester so just keep my grades up I don't think I should have too much of a problem getting into physical therapy school.

## **Rachel**

Interviewer: Rachel, let's begin with a little background information. Where are you from?

Respondent: I'm from Pound, VA

Interviewer: Tell me about Pound, VA.

Respondent: It's a little tiny place about fifteen minutes from Kentucky, about an hour and a half from Johnson City.

Interviewer: How many people live in Pound?

Respondent: Less than a thousand. It's not a very big place.

Interviewer: Do you know where Haysi is?

Respondent: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: A good friend of mine lives in Haysi and I've got relatives in Nickelsville.

Respondent: I know where both places are. Haysi's closer to me. It's like maybe 25 minutes.

Interviewer: Give me a little background information. At home do you have brothers and sisters?

Respondent: No, I'm an only child.

Interviewer: And your parents did not attend college, is that right?

Respondent: Right. My mother attended college but she never graduated. She just took like a few classes.

Interviewer: What kind of classes did your mother take?

Respondent: I'm not really sure. She only took a couple. I don't think she went more than one semester. She didn't like it.

Interviewer: What do your parents do now?

Respondent: My mother is actually going back to cosmetology school. She's doing that and my father's deceased. I actually live with my grandparents.

Interviewer: Tell me about your grandparents.

Respondent: My grandfather is 70 years old. He's worked everyday of his life. He's had like three days off his whole career. He worked at Westmoreland which was a coal mine. He

was a parts manager and he got laid off. And he's always had these little rickety end jobs. And he's pretty much kept a job until now. He's getting older and has Arthritis and he had prostate cancer. So now he's having to slow down a little bit.

Interviewer: And your grandmother?

Respondent: My grandmother is a homemaker.

Interviewer: How long have you lived with them?

Respondent: Since birth. I lived with my mother sometimes, but she had problems, so it was better for me to live with my grandparents.

Interviewer: What kind of relationship do you have with your mother today?

Respondent: Oh, we're fine. I don't hate her or nothing. It's just better to live with my grandparents is all. She's lived with us a time or two.

Interviewer: Where did you go to high school?

Respondent: Pound High School

Interviewer: Tell me about Pound High School. What was it like? How big was it?

Respondent: Uh, it was pretty small. I think there was like thirty some people graduated in my senior class. Give or take a few. A few were pregnant and dropped out.

Interviewer: How many besides yourself do you think went on to college?

Respondent: Quite a few. I don't know, probably, most of them went to college to be teachers. I mean I don't know exact number but most of them went off to the local college which is University of Virginia's College at Wise.

Interviewer: And you said quite a few of them want to be teachers?

Respondent: Yeah. Like everyone I've talked to is become a teacher. I don't know how they're going to find a job.

Interviewer: Do you think it's difficult to be a teacher today?

Respondent: Well, I wouldn't put up with the kids that go to high school. They're so mean and all. I don't think I'd stay in Virginia to teach, not where I grew up. I'd go to a big city or someplace with more money.

Interviewer: When did you make the decision to go to college?

Respondent: I pretty much knew probably when I was a freshman in high school that I wanted to go on. When I was younger I didn't really care about school or anything like that. Actually I probably should've failed like the third grade. My parents like passed me on. In Virginia you can fail one grade. So Anyways they thought I was gonna fail cause I was this kid who just didn't wanna co-operate, I guess. But it kinda changed for me when I got in about seventh grade. I started liking school a lot better. So I've been going to school ever since I been little. I haven't took any breaks. You'd think I'd been burned out.

Interviewer: What got you thinking about college?

Respondent: Probably that my parents had never been to college. My mom always goes for these she goes and does something but never finishes it. So I kinda wanted to finish something.

Interviewer: Did your high school teachers talk about college very much?

Respondent: I would have never guessed my high school teachers went to college. They never mentioned college or the importance of getting a college degree. I went through four years of high school without any mention of college that I can remember. But I already had my mind set. I ended up going to a community college.

Interviewer: Which one?

Respondent: Mountain Empire Community College and well it kinda hurt me and it kinda helped me in the same way. But I got two associates degrees from there and I came here which I don't know if it was a good idea or not, you know. Basically ETSU didn't take a lot of my credits but I just wanted to get away from home for a while.

Interviewer: How long have you been at ETSU?

Respondent: This is my first year.

Interviewer: Is this your first semester or second semester?

Respondent: Second semester

Interviewer: Now you said you weren't quite sure about ETSU or not quite sure about whether you should've gotten the Associate's degrees or what?

Respondent: I'm not quite sure I should've went to the community college because it did kinda put me behind in a lot of ways cause it didn't help me much here as far as credit wise goes. But I mean I'm glad I went to I'm kinda glad I went but in the same sense I kinda like It's kinda a waste cause it kinda put me behind about a year.

Interviewer: Are you glad you made the decision to come to ETSU?

Respondent: I don't know. I probably should've went to the college near home because my grandparents are getting old and things like that. I probably should've went to the UVA Wise and that's probably where I'm going to transfer next year. Cause I've pretty much took everything I can take for Environmental Science. Cause the thing here is Environmental Health.

Interviewer: Is it important for you to be near you grandparents as well? Is that a big part of your choice?

Respondent: Somewhat because like I said they're getting old and they're like my parents, they've pretty much raised me. So yea that has a lot to do with it. And finances as well. They take care of me and I take care of them. I like it that way. We get along.

Interviewer: If you go to UVA Wise will you live at home with your grandparents?

Respondent: Yes. That's my home. There'd be no need for me to live anywhere else.

Interviewer: Do you live in a dorm here?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Tell me about living in a dorm.

Respondent: Well, I have mixed feelings on that. The first semester I had a roommate I lived in Stone Hall and I probably shouldn't say what I was gonna.... We just didn't really get along all that well. She would bring her boyfriend in like god forever. And he'd be there from the time we woke up until like 12 at night. I had 8:15's. And it was awful. Just her attitude was outrageous. I'm pretty easy going. I get along with just about anybody. But we sure didn't so second semester I moved out and moved to Carter Hall. I decided to live by myself. I didn't want to live with anybody else after her. That was enough for me.

Interviewer: Being a student from Appalachia....What does that mean to you? Do you think about being from Appalachia? Is that part of who you are?

Respondent: To a degree, I suppose. I have to give it some thought.

Interviewer: What does that mean to you?

Respondent: To be Appalachian? You just have like a different set of values. Like even compared to Johnson City people here, when I came here it was total culture shock.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Respondent: Well, I've been overseas and everything like that but it was nothing compared to this. Just the people were different. Everybody back home knows everybody. If they see somebody out they say "hello, how are you, how ya doing." Here if you try to talk to



somebody they just keep their head down and keep going. That was the big change for me. I thought “well what’s wrong with me; do I have something on my forehead? Do I have a booger hanging out?” I didn’t know what was going on. I’ve never been treated like that.

Interviewer: So tell me about your Appalachian values. How would you define them?

Respondent: These are some hard questions. Um let’s see....my values....I would say like they’re morally good. We have a strong belief do unto others as you would do you would like them to do you. Everybody’s kinda happy-go-lucky. Help everybody out if they need help. It’s different than here especially. Everybody here is not like that at all.

Interviewer: Do you see that as a Johnson City thing or an East Tennessee thing as opposed to southwest Virginia? How would you define that?

Respondent: Probably both. I even have a great aunt that’s from east Tennessee and she acts the same way so it might be a Tennessee thing. I don’t know. Maybe I’m kinda country and everybody here is kinda city. Not like major city but different.

Interviewer: So you would say that for you, from your experience, there’s a difference between being from southwest Virginia and being from east Tennessee.

Respondent: Right

Interviewer: Have you had any other experiences that underscore that difference between east Tennessee and southwest Virginia?

Respondent: Yes, but there’s something else that I’ve noticed about living in Virginia.

Interviewer: Yes?

Respondent: I tell people I am from the South, but I don't mention ‘Appalachia’ to them. I just say that I am from Virginia. There's no need to add the "Southwest" part. The sad part is that I have to do that in Virginia. There's a certain amount of prejudice against people who live in the Southwestern part of the state. It's like we aren't good enough to be part of 'real' Virginia.

Interviewer: So, “real” Virginia is in the eastern and northern part of the state. Is that how you see it?

Respondent: [Laughing] That’s how the snobs in Virginia see it. You can see it in everything, in the schools, the funding, the jobs. Southwest Virginia is like the red-headed stepchild.

Interviewer: I see. That’s very interesting. Now, what about other differences between Tennessee and southwest Virginia.

Respondent: Well the whole roommate thing. That kinda that was very different. Back home if she had brought her boyfriend in your room you know that would be just like disgraceful. My grandma would've beat me if I did something like that to her. So it's totally different, you know. Different, I guess, views on what's acceptable and what's not.

Interviewer: When you made the decision to come to ETSU what motivated that? Were you thinking about a program or maybe getting out of southwest Virginia?

Respondent: All of the above. If I wanted to get away from home for awhile I mean I've been overseas and things like that but I'd only been there a month or something. I wanted to come here and kinda get the feel for it away from home. Kinda be self-reliant. I had planned on doing Environmental Health but I didn't really like the health aspect to it, I'm more of a tree-hugger not a disease person. So I changed my major and I decided to go back to UVA Wise cause there's nothing here for environmental science. Which is kinda weird?

Interviewer: Do you think this will be your last semester?

Respondent: Yes, most definitely

Interviewer: I want you to think back to the very first day that you were a college freshman and that was up at Mountain Empire. What was it like being on campus and going to classes?

Respondent: Mostly I was just kinda scared cause I didn't know where I was going. Cause all the buildings were so huge compared to our little high school. It was tiny and so the college was huge so I just had problems finding where I was going but after that it was I loved it it was way times better than the high school. I didn't really like high school at all but I loved community college. Even opposed to this college I like community college better.

Interviewer: What were so of the things you liked about the community college?

Respondent: The smaller group of people. You learned more. I feel like a lot of my science classes feels like were a repeat here I've already had them. I felt like I got a better education at the community college really. As far as Science and things like that cause it was one on one.

Interviewer: Think back to your first day at ETSU, what was that like?

Respondent: When I moved in the first day, um that was a little strange. When I saw my dorm room you see I had gone and looked at the dorm before I signed up for it. So when I saw that I almost cried. That place looked like a jailhouse. It was awful. It was like the worst dorm on campus. They're actually remodeling that one pretty soon. It was nasty. I mean like the lowest people on the planet live there. So you know which I don't know it's the cheapest probably or one of the cheapest.

Interviewer: What about your classes? What was it like going to classes?

Respondent: Oh I like the classes, they were alright. I didn't care for the Music class. It was humungous. It was like 200 people in there in that auditorium. It was huge.

Interviewer: So you like the smaller classes definitely.

Respondent: Yes. My English classes have been about the only really small classes I've taken at ETSU. I like them because I don't feel lost in those classes.

Interviewer: I agree. Small classes are better. Now, I'd like to talk some more about your family, like your grandparents, your mom, your relatives and so forth. What do they think about you going to college about you coming here to ETSU and so forth?

Respondent: At first my grandma she didn't really like it. She wanted me to go to college but she didn't like that I was moving away cause we were like best friends. But she's really proud of me and wants me to keep going on. And my grandpa, he was a little hesitant at first he wanted me to get a job somewhere. I had a really good job before I started school. I was making like \$10 an hour which like that's ok for you know but I didn't want to work there for ever. It's actually a government job. I didn't want to work there anymore.

Interviewer: What were you doing?

Respondent: I was working for the government doing a retirement program called Thrift Savings Plan.

Interviewer: Did your grandfather try to encourage you to stay at home or skip college?

Respondent: Well, kind of. He just wanted me to get a job cause I guess that's where he's always had a job. He just wanted me to get a job and go right into it. Which I've always had jobs I get that moral from him I guess. I'm not really that much of a sponger. So I've had jobs since I've graduated from high school. This is the only year I haven't had a job which I had to rely on them which kinda sucks cause I hate to ask money from them but I usually don't. They just give it to me.

Interviewer: How often do you go back up to see them?

Respondent: Um depends on how the weather is. Cause I like to go back home and ride my horse so I wait till the weather's really good and go back and say hey, I come to see you and then (inaudible) the next day.

Interviewer: What about your friends from high school?

Respondent: Most of my friends from high school moved off. They had their own thing. Most of them were pregnant before we graduated so they kinda have a family now. I'm glad that's for them but I don't want no babies for a long time.

Interviewer: Now what about those that have gone on to college? Have you talked to any of them about coming here to ETSU?

Respondent: We were just like um I rarely see them out um around here mostly. There's only one other person from my area that's actually here. She's a nurse major so we never see each other. What was the question again?

Interviewer: How have your friends reacted to you going to college?

Respondent: I don't know. They're just glad that I'm going, I suppose.

Interviewer: Do you have any close friends that decided not to go to college that still live back in Virginia?

Respondent: I have a few.

Interviewer: Do you see them?

Respondent: No, they're off making babies somewhere in a hole I guess. I rarely see those people and we don't keep in touch. Not seeing them at the Dollar store in the Pound or something like that. We only have one store.

Interviewer: Do you see yourself maybe going back to Pound to live when you're?

Respondent: I don't know. I haven't decided yet. It's a possibility but after my grandparents are gone I'd have nothing there. I don't really have what you'd call good friends there.

Interviewer: Imagine that I am a high school junior or senior thinking about college. Tell me about it. What can I expect?

Respondent: From ETSU?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Well, it's going to be a little bit different. You're gonna expect some culture change. People being friendly and unfriendly, mostly unfriendly. But you know you meet a few friends along the way and it kinda evens itself out. It was probably the best thing I ever did, coming to college and getting away from home for awhile. Making myself more self reliant. There'll be good times and there'll be bad times.

Interviewer: Tell me about the campus. Is it a nice campus? A nice place to go to school?

Respondent: It's a pretty nice campus. Some of the buildings are older than Methuselah but... The one we're in, Burlson. But I really like the campus. The food is horrible. That main meal, don't eat there. Don't buy the meal plan, they'll sucker you in like the first day you bring your parents and they make all this good food and then you come back and you're

like what is this? It's like Alpo on a plate you know. So definitely don't buy the meal plan or if you do just buy one meal a day. That's a big big advice there.

Interviewer: Did you visit the campus before you came here?

Respondent: No I did not. I didn't think I needed to visit. I figured a campus is a campus and that classes would be the same. Boy, was I wrong.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Respondent: Well, I should have known there would be differences. I didn't know much of anything about college when I graduated high school. I thought I did, but I didn't.

Interviewer: When you were in high school did you visit the community colleges or UVAW?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Did your teachers talk about going to college?

Respondent: Them themselves going to college or.....

Interviewer: Both. Did they share their stories or talk to you about going to college?

Respondent: Yea some of them did, mostly more so in the community college. That's what really made me come. When I did those two degrees I got an associate's degree in forestry and an associate's degree in environmental science. And so my professor he's from Nebraska, he went to the University of Nebraska and uh he kinda wanted me to come here. I don't know if it's cause his daughters come here. I'm starting to think maybe that's why he wanted me to come here. Which I seen his daughters and they're like really wild, kinda funny. But he said there was a good environmental health program here. I didn't really know what that was. I didn't much care for it. I'm more an environmental science. He really made me choose ETSU. Except the college wouldn't take any of my credits all this. But truthfully they both take about the same. So if he hadn't kinda pushed me to come here I probably wouldn't.

Interviewer: What about your high school teachers, did they talk about college very much?

Respondent: Um not really, they were just to busy assigning busy work is what I felt like. Like I said I really didn't like high school that much. I mean I like college a lot better. High school is kind of a pain in the neck, you just have to go cause you have to. Didn't want the truant officer after you.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your college work has changed you as a person?

Respondent: As in how?

Interviewer: Do you feel like you're a different person now since you've gotten a couple of associate's degrees and you're here at the university?

Respondent: I feel I'm changed for the better I hope. You know with the co college thing you live and you learn the experiences. Some are not so good and some are alright. I wouldn't say anything was spectacular. You kinda learn from being here like you learn from going out with your friends here on campus, that might not sound to good, but....

Interviewer: I refer to that as college culture. Do you think is there a strong college culture here at ETSU?

Respondent: As far as going out and things like that? Things to do..... Not on the weekends not really unless you want to go out and get dog piss drunk. But you know that's not for me every weekend. I'm not going to deny I haven't done that but just doing that every weekend is not my cup of tea.

Interviewer: If you could devise a college culture, what kind of things would you have available for students?

Respondent: Like activities? Um....I'd probably have more movies and things like that on campus we get a movie like once every three weeks in the Culp. They only have them on Fridays and then what do you do Saturday and Sunday? There's like nothing to do. I even tried to join a club here. It was some kind of like equestrian club and they said I couldn't join because I wasn't like some kind of a jumper or something. There wasn't much diversity at all. Like the clubs there's not enough diversity as far as who can join and who can't. Maybe that might help. So maybe having movie weekends and a little more diversity in.

Interviewer: Well tell me about, how do you define diversity? What does it mean for you?

Respondent: Shouldn't use that word. Diversity. Change. Different things, not just the same old thing for example your mom fixes beans and potatoes every meal. You don't want beans and potatoes every meal.

Interviewer: Now being here at ETSU have you noticed some diversity compared to where you came from?

Respondent: Uh, diverse. They're more diverse here than back home. Back home everybody's white. There's no mix. There's no like different culture and here it's like everywhere.

Interviewer: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Respondent: I don't know if you want me to answer that cause it'll be kinda different because my roommate was black. I don't know I think, no I better not say that. I mean I don't think.... There's nice people everywhere cause no matter what color your skin is there's some real raunchy people but that's everywhere not just here. It was kinda weird though

cause I was studying like the girls that lived next door in my old dorm they were black, my roommate was black, I had never been around black people I didn't know how to act. So that was kinda a culture shock you know. Cause where I come from we had one half black kid who was the quarterback and that was it.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything about black people or did you learn anything about yourself with your interactions with them, with the black people that you met?

Respondent: Yeah I learned that I'm a pretty good person believe it or not. I learned that. I saw some of the ways they acted and things like that and it just kinda dawned on me "why do people act like that?" Their behavior and things like that. Kinda like back home if you had done that type of stuff you'd get whooped. That's something that sorta transcends color.

Interviewer: Based on the information that you've given me, I would say that you're positive about getting the college degree and sort of iffy about ETSU?

Respondent: Right

Interviewer: What about being a first-generation student? Is that important to you?

Respondent: It kinda puts more emphasis on you succeeding. I don't want to be like my mom, start something and never finish. I want to finish what I'm doing, you know.

Interviewer: A lot of students I've interviewed have talked about being a first-generation student they feel like they have an added responsibility and everything but they don't see it as a bad thing.

Respondent: I don't really see it that way. I see it as kinda a job you know. I'm not getting paid well in the long run I'm getting paid to do this. I see it as an opportunity for me to succeed. See it as like a job. This is my job now. Do this so you can get done. Get another job.

Interviewer: Based upon what you've told me is there anything that you would want to emphasize about your decision to go to college?

Respondent: It's probably the best thing I ever did. I would say that it's taught me a lot socially, educationally. I'd do it again probably. I'm still going.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Respondent: I think that about does it.

### **Email Follow-up**

Interviewer: Rachel, we chatted briefly about computers the other day. Can you share your thoughts on computer technology and your time in higher education?

Respondent: Yeah, that was kinda funny. You asked me about if I had a computer, and I said that I didn't because I didn't think they were necessary for college. Well, that was before I went to college. I didn't think they were worth it. I thought they were all about games and Facebook and I don't do those things.

Interviewer: Did you have computers at your high school?

Respondent: Yes, but they were donated by the National Guard Unit in Pound. They were old and didn't do much of anything. I think they donated like a dozen computers, but only two really worked.

Interviewer: Do you feel you were prepared for college work without a computer?

Respondent: No. I knew I was behind which is why I took out the extra loan and got my laptop.

Interviewer: Would you encourage prospective college students to learn about computer technology before enrolling at a college or university?

Respondent: Yes. Absolutely. You can't be a college student without a computer.



## Maggie

Interviewer: We're going to begin the interview. Maggie, why don't you tell me a little bit about your background, um, how you came to choose ETSU, um, just sort of an introductory kind of thing.

Respondent: Um, Pretty much I chose to come to ETSU because it's close to home. I couldn't really afford to live out anywhere else, UT or something, even though it is close, it's still kind of far away. I don't have a car. Things like that. And they pretty much, I get paid to go to school, so that's the main reason.

Interviewer: Do your parents help you?

Respondent: They don't help me at all. They can't. But I'm close to them, and I help them.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Respondent: You don't get that very often, but...

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewer: Do you live on campus?

Respondent: Yes. Which will probably be changing soon.

Interviewer: So tell me about, um, tell me about living on campus? Um, was that a what was that like for you, coming from home and living on campus?

Respondent: It was a relief really, because I didn't have a vehicle to get me to and from school and I relied upon my dad, and he didn't have that great of a vehicle either, so I knew I wouldn't be a burden on him so much anymore. I have the Bucshot to take me anywhere I need to go on campus.

Interviewer: What I'd like for you to do is to think back to your very first day on campus as a new student. Um, what was that like, what was that day like, and what were you feeling as you walked to your first college class?

Respondent: I felt very prepared, um, for my first college class. I had AP courses in high school and I felt AP courses were even more advanced than college classes. It was still a rough day, though. I didn't see any of my friends. They weren't in any of my classes. So I pretty much spent the entire day without talking to anyone essentially, and it was raining that day. In fact, it rained every Tuesday and Thursday of the first month I was there. Bad days (laughter). And, um, that first day I just cried because I was so lonely. I mean I did get used to it eventually, but that first day it was especially rough.

Interviewer: Did you, how did you feel as far as being in those classes and being around those people and being around your professors.

Respondent: I felt like I belonged. I felt like I really belonged and fit in very well. I mean considering my background and everything. I think I was prepared enough in high school, I guess with the AP courses I had, the teachers that I had in high school were excellent in the honors courses.

Interviewer: What school did you go to?

Respondent: Davy Crockett.

Interviewer: You know I had the same experience when I went to college after high school. I had good high school teachers.

Respondent: We had college prep courses, and when I, my first day, I was a first-generation student. My first day on campus I felt like I belonged. I was scared, but I felt like I belonged.

Interviewer: Right. Now we've talked before about a couple of issues related to being a first-generation student, and one of the things that was interesting in our discussion was that you felt that being near ETSU ....it made it easier for you to make that change from HS to college. Would you comment on that?

Respondent: It's close to home. Even if I could afford to go away and go to a different school. I like being close to my family. It's that safety net thing we were talking about. you know. My friends are here. I generally don't like change. It's just my personality. I'm pretty quiet, shy. I couldn't handle a big university.

Interviewer: So being able to being close to your family, those were important things for you as far as where you went to college.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: So tell me about your family and your friends and so forth. Um, How have they reacted to your being a college student.

Respondent: Well, it was really no surprise from my friends, because I've always been in school with them and they know how I am. They know that I'm fairly academic and that college would be right for me. Um, my family, ever since I was five years old, my mom has encouraged me to do the very best I can in academic studies, so, while she didn't get past the 9th grade. She stayed at home with me, and she helped me read and study, so I was very prepared kindergarten. Ever since she went to school with me when I was five, I always wanted to be a teacher. They've always encouraged me.

Interviewer: Very good. Um, now speaking of your friends, um, what about them? Have they gone to college?

Respondent: Yes, they have gone to college. I've got one friend, one of my best friends goes to Tusculum, and she'll be graduating next year, I think. My best friend, Sasha, goes here. She's a math major where I was English, which is weird. [laughter] And she went for a couple of years and then got married and moved to California and she's in the process of going back to school out there.

Interviewer: Do you think that um that either of those people were first-generation, did you feel that there was support at DC and that that you were encouraged?

Respondent: Oh yes. Very encouraged. Like even with the AP program, like, um, the tests, they cost money, something like \$75 a pop, but they always repeat ??? at the end, like whether I've passed or failed. One teacher in particular, I'm not very confident sometimes in my abilities, but when I was going in to take these tests, she pulled me aside and said "you can do this."

Interviewer: Now, your teachers, um, tell me about them. I know that in our area, um, a lot of teachers have their teaching creds. from ETSU. That's probably true at DC. Did your teachers, did they talk about ETSU? Did you hear about ETSU?

Respondent: Well, my junior year, I had an AP teacher, she said, she went here, she was an English major. She said they have an excellent English program, and that stuck with me. At that time, I didn't really know what I wanted to do, so my senior year I had another great English teacher. She helped me quite a bit, too. She told me a few things about the English department at ETSU. she also helped me apply to ETSU.

Interviewer: So you had, by the time you made the choice to apply to ETSU, now did you apply to other schools?

Respondent: No, I thought about it. I thought about applying to Vanderbilt or UT, but I wanted to be at home as opposed to going to a big fancy school elsewhere. For the same quality education, I can live near my parents and family. And it's less expensive. And it's tough to be at a school like Vanderbilt and in a city like Nashville and be broke.

Interviewer: So, you would say that you had a good solid preparation for coming to college.

Respondent: Oh yes.

Interviewer: So, now, let me ask you something a little bit different. Were there any expectations that you had about college before you got here?

Respondent: Well, as far as the English courses are concerned, I expected them to be much more difficult, because of my AP courses in high school. Um, like in these and what not, I thought there wouldn't be an attendance policy. I thought I'd just pop into class whenever

I wanted to and be alright. I found out very quickly that if you do lay out you're probably going to fail.

Interviewer: Were there movies or television shows that you watched that guided your understanding of college before you got here?

Respondent: Um, well, probably silly things I saw on television or at the movies. Most of the movies that I know about are terrible when it comes to showing what life is like in college. They either make it out to be one big party, or they make it so snooty, like every school is a Harvard wannabe. And that's just silly to me.

Interviewer: What about the TV shows?

Respondent: I don't watch a lot of TV, so I'm not that familiar with those shows. the only thing I do watch regularly is House.

Interviewer: Great show!

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Now, um, I guess you've addressed this, but you might have some ideas about college before you got here, like the attendance policies and things like that. Have your expectations evolved now that you've been here for a little while? Are you thinking, what are you thinking in terms of college now? Are you looking ahead to the future?

Respondent: Yeah, right now I'm thinking about what I need to take over the next few semesters. I want to finish all my basic requirements, that kind of thing, then I'm also thinking about what I'll do when I'm finished with school completely. Maybe grad school or something like that. I don't know. I expect to graduate on time and such.

Interviewer: Did you think about graduate school before you came to college?

Respondent: Oh, no. Grad school never entered my mind before I came to college. I had no idea that grad school existed. I guess I had no idea where professors got their education and such. Overall, college is easier than I thought, but I also found out that it takes some getting used to. I'm responsible for my own work. My professors don't follow me around reminding me of deadlines and such. College is easier in one way, but it's much harder in others, especially because I didn't know what to expect. I didn't think about the responsibility before I started taking classes. There's a lot of responsibility involved in being a college student, which is probably why a lot of students drop out.

Interviewer: It probably has a big impact on those students.

Respondent: And even though college is easier than what I thought it would be, there are difficult courses. In high school, you mainly studied for a test, but in college it's more involved. There's more to learn, and you have to think about it in practical terms. IN that

way, college is much harder than high school. You are more involved in your own education, I think. That's not true in high school.

Respondent: I'm taking a chemistry course right now, and I don't know if I'll get anything better than a C for the term. That's where college is harder. You take, maybe, fewer courses, but they cover so much territory. No one told me about that before I came to ETSU, not even my high school teachers. And a lot of what they told me turned out to be wrong. Like when I was talking about attendance, one of my HS teachers told me that I wouldn't have to come to class if I didn't want to, that I only had to show up once or twice a month and still make a good grade. There's no way I could do that in any of my classes. [laughter] I sort of felt like a fool when I thought about what she told me.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Respondent: Well, it's like I had nobody to tell me the real deal about college.

Interviewer: Do you think being a first-generation student made it harder?

Respondent: Oh, yes I do. I was lucky, I guess. I knew the campus pretty well from living so close for all these years, but I knew very little about what it meant to be a student here. I thought it was the same as high school, only bigger. No one told me about all the work and what it's like to be a college student. I definitely felt a little left out there.

Interviewer: Maggie, what about your Appalachian heritage? Does that make a difference in your college life?

Respondent: That's a good question. I'm not sure. I don't really think about Appalachia that much. I've seen some very poor people around here, but usually think of Virginia or West Virginia as Appalachia.

Interviewer: What does it mean to you to be a first-generation college student from Appalachia?

Respondent: Being a first-generation college student from Appalachia means responsibility to me. I am not sure if everyone feels this way or not, but I feel a strong need to give back some of my education to others. It's more than just being a hillbilly or drinking moonshine all day. It's not about being poor and taking handouts from the government.

Interviewer: Do you equate Appalachia with poverty?

Respondent: Um, maybe, without even thinking about it. That's odd. I never thought about it before now, but yes, I do equate Appalachia with poor people who live on the land, that kind of thing. Poverty. Family feuds. Hillbillies. The usual stuff.

Interviewer: Would you consider these descriptions to be stereotypes?

Respondent: Um, yes, I would. They are stereotypes very much. Like, most everyone I know is from Appalachia and no one is like that. It's weird.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself Appalachian or Southern?

Respondent: Definitely Southern. Yes.

Interviewer: Are there any positive ways to describe Appalachia?

Respondent: Well, it's certainly a beautiful part of the country. Here's the strange part. I rarely ever think about being Appalachian. There's very little in Johnson City to remind me that I am a hillbilly. [Laughter]

Interviewer: That is interesting. Are there any things in your life that do remind you of your Appalachian heritage. Of being a hillbilly?

Respondent: Well, there's the food. It's good, especially when it's summer and you can eat from the garden.

Interviewer: Do you have any Appalachian food stories?

Respondent: Um, do you mean traditional food like beans and cornbread.

Interviewer: Sure. Tell me about that.

Respondent: I don't make beans, but I do know how to make really good cornbread. My mom taught me and she learned it from her mom. It's passed down like that.

Interviewer: So, I really do like cornbread. How can I make my own?

Respondent: Okay, it's easy, but it probably sounds complicated. Here goes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: It's simple, but you have to do it right or the cornbread won't have a good crust. You turn the oven on high, about 450 degrees. You pour some oil into a cast iron skillet and put it into the oven to heat up while you make the cornbread batter. My mom taught me to use nothing but cornmeal, an egg, and buttermilk for the best cornbread, and that's what I use when I make it. I just mix it up till it's like pancake batter. When the skillet is real hot, I pour in the batter and bake it till it's brown and crunchy.

Interviewer: That's the way I love it. That's almost identical to the way I learned to make cornbread.

Respondent: That's the way to make cornbread like the old days.

Interviewer: Do you have any other stories about aspects of your Appalachian heritage that you enjoy?

Respondent: Some of the music is okay. I love Dolly Parton. She doesn't bring down all that bluegrass music. I go to Dollywood like four or five times a year. [Laughter]

Interviewer: I have friends who do the same thing. They love Dollywood.

Respondent: I think she's a strong woman who has made it good in life by sticking to her Appalachian roots. She's sort of like a hero.

Interviewer: That's a great way to think about Dolly, Maggie. So, now, let's change gears a little and go back to college.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: So, imagine that I am a HS junior or senior, and I am a FG student, and I see you one weekend back in Jonesboro and ask you what you're doing. You say you're at ETSU. I say something like well, I'm thinking about going to college, I don't know. What's it like? What would you tell me?

Respondent: I would say that it's great! It's so much better than HS, um, basically, you choose your schedule. I'd say that you should really do your research. You need to seek out answers to your questions. Get involved in one of those programs if there is one. If there's someone there to help you along the way, that would be good. Someone who can talk to you about what it's like to be in college. That would be good. It's a big decision, and it's a big change in your life. You need to be prepared for it. You have to know your deadlines. You have to know your finances, too. How are you going to pay for college? Those kinds of things. It's scary, really, when you think about it. College sort of pulls you out of your comfort zone, which is the plan, I think. [laughter]. It's just such a good experience, and I love it! That's what I would say, too.

Interviewer: What would you tell me about what I should expect when I am in the classes, when I'm in those classes that I take? What should I expect from my professors as opposed to my HS teachers.

Respondent: Um, information isn't gonna be spoon fed to you like in HS. There won't be notes available to you if you miss a class. That kind of thing. Professors aren't as scary as you might think. They seem to be generous with their time and such. You have to be willing to go up to them first, though. They don't follow you around telling you when papers are due like in HS. The nice thing is the online stuff that is available. Most of my professors post notes and deadlines online, but no one makes you go look at them. Again, it's about personal responsibility, I think. HS teachers do everything for you. College professors expect you to participate in the learning process, not just sit there like a bump on a log. So, I would say to take good notes, pay attention, and not be afraid to ask questions or introduce yourself to your professor.

Interviewer: As a college teacher, I can tell you that it is frustrating to have students just sit quietly in my classroom.

Respondent: But that's how we're trained in HS. We don't ask questions. We just take notes and wait for the tests. No one prepares us for college that way.

Interviewer: Did you feel unprepared for college?

Respondent: My grades were good, but I didn't know how to behave in college. I even asked one of my professors where my homeroom was. I was worried that I was missing homeroom. [Laughter]

Interviewer: How did the professor react?

Respondent: He explained that there are no homerooms in college. I was so embarrassed. I went to my car and cried. I think I cried every night that first week.

Interviewer: Oh, no. That's too bad. Did you start feeling better about the experience after awhile?

Respondent: Sure. It wasn't too bad. I made friends and learned how to get around and stuff. It took awhile, and my learning curve went way up, but I learned how to be a college student.

Interviewer: That's good.

Respondent: Look at me. Look at me. A year ago, I wouldn't have known what that term meant. Now I'm using it like a college student. I am a college student. That's the part that's been missing. I took classes and did all my work, but I didn't feel like a real college student until this very moment. Just using that simple phrase made the difference. I *am* a college student.

Interviewer: Do you consider that to be a breakthrough for you, Maggie?

Respondent: Yes. Yes, I do. It's powerful.

Interviewer: Do you want to stop here and continue later?

Respondent: Just a short break. I need some tea or something.

Interviewer: Sure. No problem. [Short break]

Interviewer: Okay, I'm glad we took that break. So, what about college culture, other than classroom and academic work. What kind of things have you done on campus or near campus that would qualify as part of college culture?



Respondent: Well, let's see. Well, my boyfriend is in a frat at the university, so I've done some things with him, like parties and the things that they do. Last semester, I was actually in the homecoming dance that they had, the square dancing thing they had going on. I mean, it's fun, but I try not to take on too much, you know, but that's my biggest reason for not joining a sorority. I was thinking about joining a co-ed service fraternity that does lots of community service things, but I want to focus more on my academics right now. I'm afraid if I took on too much right now, my grades would slip, and I don't want that to happen. Like I said before, I'm cautious about change. [laughter]

Interviewer: What about things like attending musical events on campus or going to the museums to see art or anything like that?

Respondent: I've been to basketball games and some of the multicultural events offered through that office. That was fun. Other than that, not much. I know that ETSU offers a lot of stuff, but I don't have time.

Interviewer: Does ETSU from your perspective, does ETSU advertise adequately?

Respondent: Oh yes, the important announcements. The emails that I receive. They are "always important"! They give me a lot of information. And the East Tennessean. I read that paper a lot.

Interviewer: Do you feel that college has changed who you are?

Respondent: Yes! When I remember that first day, it was very painful for me. My friends weren't here, and I hardly talked to any one. I felt like I was on the outside looking in. And now, I am still fairly shy, but I am much more open to new experiences and new people.

Interviewer: Is that important for you?

Respondent: Yes, it is. It's making my life better. I thought I'd never come out of my shell, but I am.

Interviewer: Is that part of the educational process?

Respondent: Yes, because in HS, I feel like I could have done a lot better in some of my course had I asked questions. I was so painfully shy. Whereas here, I feel better about asking for help. I feel stronger as a person, and it's because of my experiences at ETSU for sure.

### **Email Follow-up**

Interviewer: Maggie, we didn't talk much about technology during the interview. I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about your experiences with technology prior to enrolling at ETSU and your experiences with technology after enrolling.

Respondent: I guess we are talking about computers. I used computers when I was in high school but not nearly so much as I do at ETSU. We had a few computers, but there were only about a dozen for a very large school. In my senior year, my drama teacher had a computer in her classroom, but it didn't work. I don't think you could get through most classes at ETSU with a computer or some sort of technology. I don't have a laptop, but I do have a desktop in my bedroom. I would be lost without it.

Interviewer: How much did you know about using computers to help with class work when you started taking college classes.

Respondent: Not very much except for Word. I had never done research online before, and I didn't know anything about Google Scholar or accessing the library online.

Interviewer: Do you feel comfortable doing research online and accessing the library online now?

Respondent: Oh sure. It doesn't take long, but you have to ask questions to learn how. I had a couple of professors who showed us in class how to get into the library, and that was very helpful. I feel comfortable now.

## Jonathan

Interviewer: Why don't we begin with a little background information. Where are you from?

Respondent: Pikeville, Kentucky

Interviewer: Is that in the eastern mountains of Kentucky?

Respondent: Yes, it's in Pike county. It's the Eastern-most county, but the town is in the western part of the county. It's pretty small, lots of mountains. It's pretty, if you like all the mountains.

Interviewer: And you're a first-generation college student?

Respondent: Yes. My mom and dad really wanted me to go to college to do better than they did in life, I guess. Actually, I didn't think much about going to college till I was a senior in high school.

Interviewer: What led you to choose ETSU?

Respondent: Um, soccer. They offered me a scholarship. I was thinking about going to Pikeville College and living at home, but my mom pushed me to take the scholarship and come here to ETSU. She said it would be good for me to get out of Pikeville for awhile.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Respondent: Well, I miss home a lot. I miss being able to step outside my back door and into the woods behind my parents' home. My family has lived on that land as far back as my great grandfather, and I've known the trails and caves and waterfalls there all of my life.

Interviewer: Wow. It sounds beautiful there. Do your parents own a lot of land in Pikeville.

Respondent: We don't live right in town, but, yes, my parents own about a hundred acres, most of it mountain. We moved in with my granddad when grandma died. I was just a kid at the time. We had moved to Jackson for about a year, but then my grandma died and we moved back to look after my granddad. I guess I really took to the mountains.

Interviewer: We'll come back to your mountains in a little bit.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: What about now? Do you live on campus?

Respondent: Yes, we have to for the first two years.

Interviewer: Because of soccer?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that? Do you like dorm life?

Respondent: Yes I do. I didn't think I would, but it's been really good. I've met a bunch of good people and made new friends that I wouldn't make otherwise I guess. It's made me grow up too because I don't have mom there to do my laundry or fix me food or anything. I think living in the dorm is good too because you get to live away from home but in a way that keeps your parents happy. Living on campus is part of the whole college experience, I guess.

Interviewer: And how often do you get back home?

Respondent: Um, I guess normally just like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and spring break and then Summer. Just the normal breaks

Interviewer: So tell me a little more about home. You have brothers and sisters?

Respondent: I have a younger sister.

Interviewer: And you live with both your parents?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about your family's reaction to you coming to college, especially coming to ETSU.

Respondent: Well at first my dad was like hesitant I guess because it's kinda far away. But then after talking with the coach and stuff he felt better because there'd be like another like father role I guess. Like someone to go to if I had problems. And my mom was just excited overall, cause I was playing soccer and cause I had the scholarship to come to ETSU.

Interviewer: If you had not decided to go to college, what would you have done?

Respondent: I needed to get away from my parents. If I didn't go to school, I would have had to start mining just like my dad and my grandfather. I knew going to school would get me away from all that.

Interviewer: And you say you have a little sister?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Does she plan to go to college?

Respondent: Um, probably community college or Pikeville College.

Interviewer: Is this your second semester at ETSU?

Respondent: No, fourth.

Interviewer: Did you come to ETSU right out of high school?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Did you go to any other institutions of higher before you came to ETSU?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Think back to your very first day here on campus. What was that like, how did you feel being a freshman first day on campus?

Respondent: I guess nervous about like not knowing where I was exactly suppose to go, being able to find my classes.

Interviewer: Did you participate in any off the pre-semester things that went on?

Respondent: No, we weren't able to.

Interviewer: When did you get here prior to the semester starting?

Respondent: Um, I think the beginning of July, actually.

Interviewer: Did your parents come with you?

Respondent: Um, to initially bring me here, yea.

Interviewer: What did your parents tell you about college? Did they have anything to share with you about being a college student?

Respondent: Not really. I mean just have fun, if I need anything call em I guess. They don't know much about college. They just said to do well in my classes.

Interviewer: Do you remember your first college class?

Respondent: Art History

Interviewer: And what was that like?

Respondent: I thought it was boring because I'm not an art person. And they made me take it because I was like deficient in the art category or something. So, I didn't really enjoy it but because I like math better. I'm more of a math person.

Interviewer: Are you a math major?

Respondent: Um, not sure. I'm undecided now, but I might go into math or business.

Interviewer: Did you have to take any developmental studies courses or anything?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Tell me about your friends back at home. What did they think about you coming to college here at ETSU?

Respondent: They didn't really think that much of it cause oh one of my friends that I or one of my really good friends goes to school in Florida so. I mean they think it's far but.

Interviewer: How far is it from Pikeville to here?

Respondent: About four hours.

Interviewer: Did a lot of your friends go to college?

Respondent: Not really. I'm not sure actually.

Interviewer: Do you see any of your friends when you're back on vacation?

Respondent: When I go home, yeah.

Interviewer: Imagine that I am a high school junior or senior and I'm thinking about going to college. I'm a first-generation. I'm thinking about going to college and I ask you about your experiences, what would you tell me about what it's like to go to college?

Respondent: I mean I enjoy it. I think it's, I like it.

Interviewer: What about getting involved in the stuff going on campus and taking classes. I mean what kind of advice would you give me?

Respondent: I would say I'd definitely take like the amount of classes they recommend you take if not more. I would think that you'd want to get involved just so you're not just like sitting there. And I think it helps with school work because it makes you do your work like on time instead of procrastinating until the last minute. And you definitely need a computer.

Interviewer: You mentioned when we were talking earlier that you had some trouble with computers when you first started taking classes at ETSU. Could you elaborate?

Respondent: I took the CSCI course, but it didn't really help much. I still didn't know how to log in to D2L. I didn't even know what it was till one of my teachers told us we had to use it for the syllabus and for turning in papers.

Interviewer: Are you more comfortable with computer technology in the classroom now?

Respondent: Sure. It's not a big deal now.

Interviewer: What about social things on campus?

Respondent: I don't really have time for much social activity. I take classes and practice. We have lots of games. I spend most of my time with the other players in my dorm.

Interviewer: Let's back up...how would you define just from your experiences does ETSU provide you with social activities, things to do? Is the campus since you live here is it fun to live on campus here?

Respondent: I would say no.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Respondent: I mean I don't think there's that much to like. I don't think they offer a lot to do but it could be that we're so busy with like going to practice and stuff that I don't really realize like everything that's going on.

Interviewer: Where do you live on campus?

Respondent: Um, Governor's Hall in the dorms.

Interviewer: If you could add some social things to campus what would you add?

Respondent: That's a tough one.

Interviewer: For instance other people have said that they would add more movies, they would have more movie nights, they would maybe have more concerts on campus, more um, just things like that. Are those things that you would like to see?

Respondent: Yeah, and I guess I could also say like them promoting athletics better because I know like the general students don't really come out and to the games like overall except for the basketball. Its' always just like the other athletes that are there. Or like doing cookouts or something like that at the games. Offering something else for the students so they might come and be interested or something like that.

Interviewer: So let's focus in on you being a first-generation student. Do you think it had an impact on your experiences in college, being a first-generation student?

Respondent: Not really

Interviewer: The statistics say that ETSU has one of the highest percentages of first-generation students of any college in the country. Over 40% of our students are first-generation. Do you think that has an influence as far as how comfortable that you might be as a first-generation student here or the fact there are lots of first-generation students.

Respondent: I mean I had no idea about that so. I guess no.

Interviewer: Have you ever felt uncomfortable in any situation on campus that you thought if I knew more about college I would probably know what's going on here?

Respondent: I don't think so.

Interviewer: So would you say that most of your experiences then as far as dealing with being a college student and being a first-generation college student that most of your experiences have been positive?

Respondent: Uh-huh, yeah

Interviewer: Let's talk a little bit about Appalachia. Since coming to ETSU, have you been aware of Appalachian culture here?

Respondent: No. Not like home, I guess, but I haven't thought about it much because most everyone around me is from Appalachia, I guess. I don't see much of Appalachia in Johnson City the way I see it in Pikeville. It's different here. Not bad, but different.

Interviewer: How is it different here?

Respondent: It isn't in your face so much here. You could be on campus or in Johnson City and not know you are in Appalachia. It might be the college, maybe? I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Are there things you look for that define Appalachia?

Respondent: I'm not sure. I guess I grew up in it, so I don't see it so much. I guess it has to do with people living in the mountains and stuff. You don't see that here the way it is in Kentucky. Pike County is poor. It seems like there's more money and things here.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your Appalachian heritage from home? Has that had an impact on who you are as a person?

Respondent: Well, like I said, I haven't given it much thought. I guess I might think about it more if I was going to a college away from this area. What I don't like is the way people think about people from Appalachia. The stereotypes and things like that make me mad.



Interviewer: Expand on that. What things make you mad? Have you experienced Appalachian stereotypes?

Respondent: Ever year in April, they do Hillbilly Days in Pikeville to raise money for some charity. It's sorta funny and a big deal. Thousands of people show up, and the Shriners dress up like hillbillies to raise money. They kinda make fun of hillbillies, but there's lots of things to do. I usually go hunting that weekend.

Interviewer: How do you feel about Hillbilly Days? What is the charity?

Respondent: They're raising money for some children's hospital, but they make hillbillies look stupid and rough. It's demeaning. I guess I'm a hillbilly, but I don't dress that way or drink moonshine all the time. I just don't like seeing people dress up like clowns to make people laugh at people in Appalachia.

Interviewer: So you choose not to participate.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: Well, are there any things that stand out to you as positive aspects of Appalachian life? For instance, some students have talked about food memories. Do you have any such memories.

Respondent: There was those times my family made apple butter. That was a lot of fun.

Interviewer: Oh, really. I like apple butter. Tell me more about the experience.

Respondent: My grandma and aunts would come over early in the morning while my grandfather and dad hung the big copper pot outside in the backyard over a fire. It was October and I had to go to school, but I kept thinking about the apple butter all day. By the time I got home, my mom and my grandma were stirring the apple butter, and it smelled so good. My grandma brought a little bottle of cinnamon oil, and she would add drops to the apple butter from time to time. My mom likes to add those little "red-hot" cinnamon candies that turn the apple butter red and make it hot. Dad kept adding wood to the fire, and my aunts were in the kitchen getting what looked like a hundred jars ready. The smell of the fire and the cinnamon will be with me forever. And the taste of that apple butter over biscuits and butter on a cold winter morning. That's a very good memory.

Interviewer: It definitely does sound delicious! So, Jonathan, when you describe yourself, what term do you use? Do you call yourself Appalachian, Southern, or some other term?

Respondent: [Laughter] Me and my friends usually call ourselves red necks or hillbillies.

Interviewer: In a joking manner?

Respondent: Kind of. I don't really care one way or the other. I'm okay with Southerner or Appalachian. Doesn't matter.

Interviewer: Okay, let's go back to your experiences at ETSU. Would you recommend ETSU to other college students?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: What are some of the good things about ETSU?

Respondent: I think the size is a good thing because it's not small enough where we know everybody but the class sizes are still relatively little. And campus isn't like huge like you can get from one side to the other in like five minutes.

Interviewer: Any downsides to ETSU?

Respondent: Not that I can think of right now. I think the faculty is very helpful too. A downside I guess could be parking. Just if you want something.

Interviewer: Believe it or not we're coming down to the end. Do you think in the almost two years that you've been here has college changed you?

Respondent: I think so.

Interviewer: In what way?

Respondent: It's made me more outgoing because I have to do things on my own and I can't rely on my parents to make phone calls or appointments for me. I guess more responsible in a way.

Interviewer: Have your parents commented on any of this? Have they noticed these things?

Respondent: They've noticed that I've changed a lot.

Interviewer: Do they see those changes as positive?

Respondent: Well, most of them, I guess. I don't tell them everything.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Respondent: I didn't think I would change when I started taking classes here. I was set in my ways. Then, I realized that I was thinking differently about issues than I had before.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on that point a bit?

Respondent: We had to discuss gay marriage in one class. I was against it when I started reading the stuff in the book, but then I changed my mind. I couldn't figure out how two men or two women marrying would hurt me, so I changed my mind about it. I haven't told my parents yet, and I don't plan on telling them. [Laughter]

Interviewer: How does that make you feel, not being able to tell your parents?

Respondent: I guess I'll have to stay in the closet for awhile. [Laughter] I feel like I've changed, but I don't think they would understand."

Interviewer: Are your parents conservative about such issues?

Respondent: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: So, even with the things you can't tell your parents, are you glad you made the choice to go to college?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: What do you think that college will do for you? Let me rephrase it. What do you think that being a college student and then earning that degree at the end, what will that do for you?

Respondent: Hopefully, like let me take care of myself on my own and not have to rely on my parents or anything. And just like a feeling of accomplishment, I guess.

Interviewer: So from what I can tell, from what you've told me college has been a positive thing for you so far.

Respondent: Uh-huh

Interviewer: And you see it as being a transformative experience that maybe you're not the same person that you were a couple of years ago when you were graduating high school?

Respondent: Uh-huh

Interviewer: Some students have told me about coming to the campus prior to being here full time as a student, visiting the campus. Did you do anything like that prior to?

Respondent: Yes, I came onto recruiting trips through soccer and they do like the whole campus tour and they like let you meet with like the department you want to major in and.

Interviewer: Did you get to sit in on any classes?

Respondent: Um, I didn't because I came during like the summer so, if I would've come like when we were in class they would've put me in a class but...

Interviewer: Did you get to meet any professors or other students?

Respondent: Um, other students

Interviewer: Was that helpful in making up your mind about coming to ETSU?

Respondent: Uh-huh cause you like know what you're getting yourself into and just the atmosphere and stuff like that.

Interviewer: What did you think of East Tennessee when you got here, just East Tennessee generally when you got here the first time?

Respondent: It's a lot like where I live just its not as mountainous.

Interviewer: Do you miss Pikeville?

Respondent: The mountains. I miss the mountains and my family. That's about it.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to say about being a student at ETSU?

Respondent: I don't think so

Interviewer: Do you have any other questions?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Comments or anything?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Well, thank you for participating in this project.

Respondent: Thanks. I enjoyed it.

## VITA

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- Clash of the Domestic Goddesses: Martha Stewart vs. Nigella Lawson. Presented  
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- Hitchcock’s Everyman: James Stewart as the “Sensitive Hero” in *Rear Window*  
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Toward an Understanding of Poetry and Psychoanalytic Criticism in the 1102 Classroom. Presented at the 1994 Florida College English Association Meeting in Gainesville, Florida.